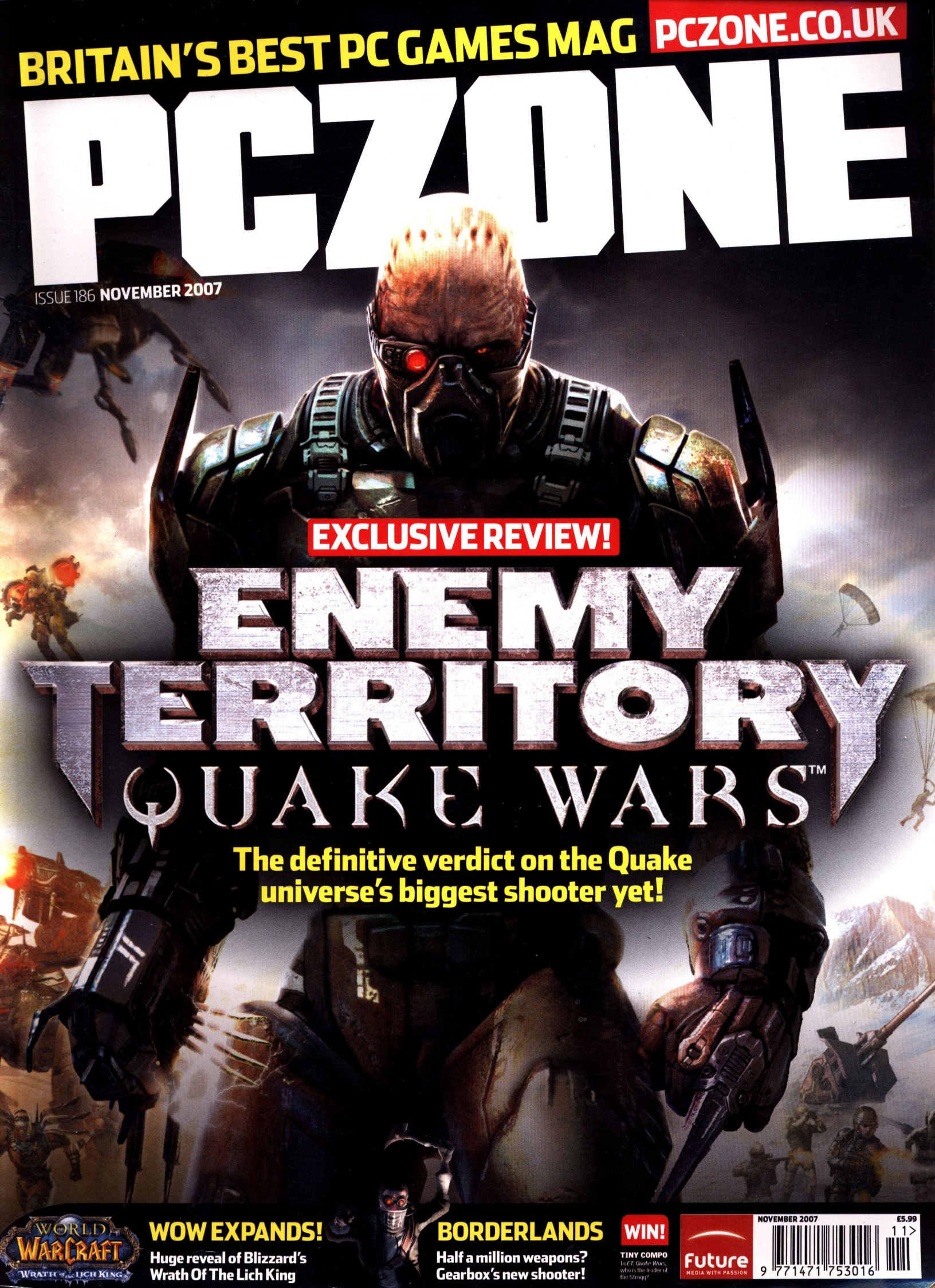
BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

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# PCZONE

ISSUE 186 NOVEMBER 2007



EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

## ENEMY TERRITORY QUAKE WARS™

The definitive verdict on the Quake universe's biggest shooter yet!

WORLD OF WARCRAFT WRATH OF THE LICH KING

**WOW EXPANDS!**
Huge reveal of Blizzard's Wrath Of The Lich King

**BORDERLANDS**
Half a million weapons? Gearbox's new shooter!

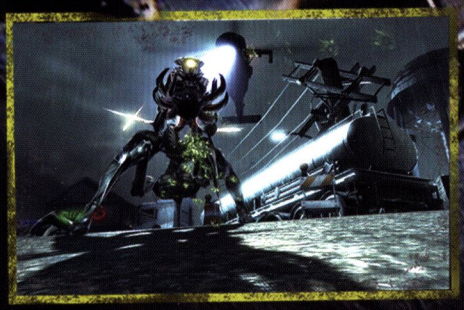
**WIN!**
TINY COMPO
In *ET: Quake Wars*, who is the leader of the Strogg?

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COVER STORY

## 62 ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

**The Strogg wars have begun. Verdict here!**



## NEVERQUEST 123

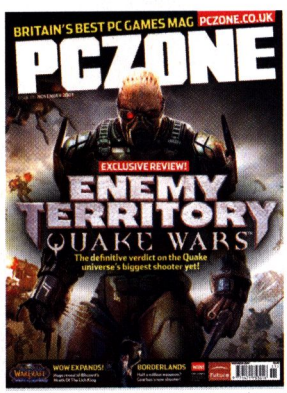
**"By way of celebration, I kick a passing turtle to death..."**



## OP FLASHPOINT 2 52

**CODEMASTERS DECLARE WAR WITH THEIR MASSIVE SHOOTER SEQUEL**

### WHAT'S ON THE COVER?





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32 BORDERLANDS


**Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 77 words...**

New boy Oli goes literally batshit over the new *WOW* expansion, there's a new game from Gearbox with, like, half a million weapons, General British chats with us (though sadly not dressed as a space warlord) and *Operation Flashpoint 2* sounds astounding. Meanwhile, *Quake Wars* and *World In Conflict* kick ass, *Stranglehold* woos Will Porter and *Two Worlds* turns out to be worse than one. Oh, and Steve Hill and Prezzer try to spit-roast the Queen.

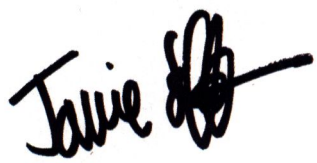


## SUNSHINE ON A RAINY DAY

**AS OUR DREADFUL** summer slides into autumn, at least we're being rewarded for enduring the endless wet weather with a flood of amazing games. This month we've another review exclusive – *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* – a collaboration between the mighty id Software and the UK's own Splash Damage, based just 45 minutes (as the Strogg Icarus flies) from the *PC ZONE* offices. And very good it is too – you can read Steve's definitive opinions on page 62. Also this month we've the verdict on *World In Conflict*, a hugely enjoyable and accessible RTS "for people who don't like RTSs"™, beginning on page 72.

We've also got a good glimpse of the games that'll be wetting our whistles in 2008, including *WOW: Wrath Of The Lich King*, *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* and *Borderlands*.

However, what's really brightened us up this past month are the emails, letters, silly texts, forum posts, photos of you holding the mag in weird places around the globe, live online chats, pubcast feedback, screenshots of your avatars and deathmatch scraps in Fight Club. We've introduced more and more ways for you to interact with *PC ZONE* magazine and our website (www.pczone.co.uk), so if you haven't already, get involved, and you could win some of the dozens of great games littering our desks. Yep, this really would be a lonely, rainswept mag without you...



**Jamie Sefton, editor**


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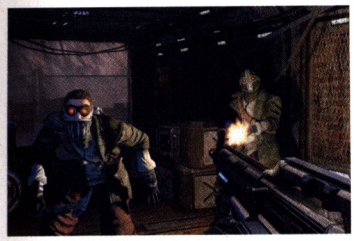


REVIEW

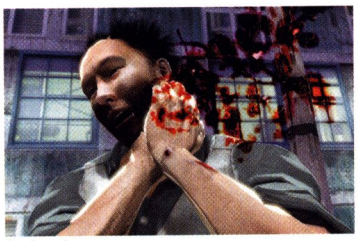
## 72 WORLD IN CONFLICT

**Can this explosive RTS breathe new life into the strategy genre? Read our definitive review here!**

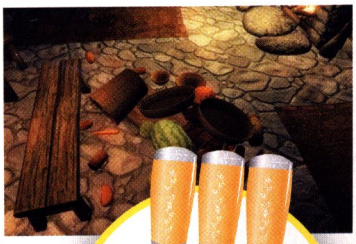

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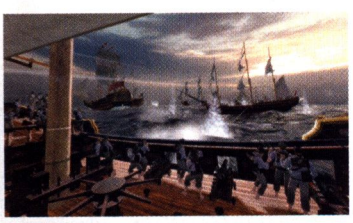
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**Strapped for cash? Find the best new free games here. This month: chameleonic ninjas and time-shifting robots**


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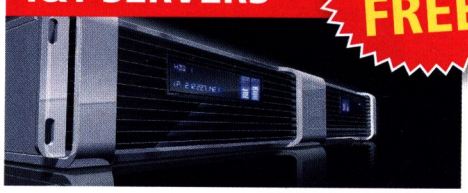
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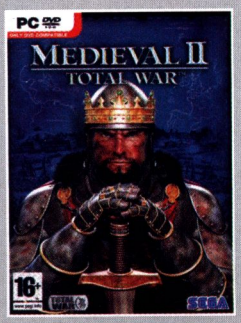
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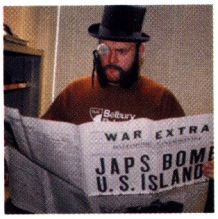
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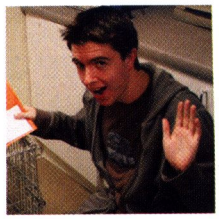
# MEET THE TEAM

## The best of the best of the best... sir!

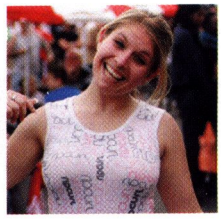



### JON 'LOG' BLYTH
**Cannon fodder**
**AGE:** 33
**LIKES:** Dogs
**DISLIKES:** Wasps
**FANCIES:** Bears
**FAVE GAME:** Erm, *BioShock?*
**PLAYING NOW:** *TrackMania United, BioShock, Mystery PI*

Log bought a bike this month, and can now be seen teetering up the Seven Sisters Road, bellowing with the effort of every turn of the pedals. Every hill is nature's way of laughing shrilly in his face, the wind a thousand slaps to long-numb cheeks. The panicked breathlessness that comes with physical exertion is like being smothered by a three-ton sponge, and the chain has rapidly become a cruel metaphor for captivity and infinity. Also, the handlebars are shit. The only consolation is that the bike comes with a little bell that goes 'ding', and is funny.



### STEVE HOGARTY
**Front-line trooper**
This month Steve reviewed *Quake Wars*. When asked about his impressions of majestic Bromley, home of Splash Damage and the Glades Shopping Centre, Steve replied, "It isn't very nice."
**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:**
***BioShock***



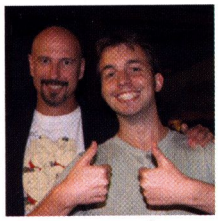
### SUZY WALLACE
**Lance corporal**
Suzy is away at the moment, so we can't ask her what she's been up to. To the best of our recollection, however, she's been wrestling kangaroos and using a fork to catapult peas into a pelican's gullet.
**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:**
***BioShock***



### JAMIE SEFTON
**Five-star general**
Fresh from his honeymoon in the jungle, Jamie has mostly been sitting, looking baffled at the incredible chain of madness and poor eyesight that led to a real, human woman accepting him as husband.
**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:**
***BioShock***



### PAVEL BARTER
**Black ops**
Pavel is the King Charles spaniel of investigative journalism. Nipping at facts, growling at issues, he's hampered only by his big, floppy ears, which make it difficult to hear people on the phone.
**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:**
**The Investigative Trombone**



### WILL PORTER
**Field marshal**
Will's travels took him to the Leipzig Games Convention this month, where he stumbled across *C&C*'s Kane! The charismatic villain posed for a photo, before walking off cackling.
**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:**
***BioShock***



### EMPTY CHAIRS
**MIA**
Two members of the team left this month, leaving two of our finest chairs unsat upon. These buttockless pedestals are just swivelling idly until the right arse comes along to fill them. We're interviewing a number of derrières right now, with a gentle cupping action.

**STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH...** Log now has a computer that can run games. (He's been making it all up so far.)
**STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH...** Losing two members of staff, including the one who told us all what to do. That week spent fiddling with our balls seemed like a good idea at the time...

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

**DEP.ART.ED** 45 mins Our deputy art editor has left us – was he trying to give us clues with his job title? Genius
**NEW GAMING COMPUTERS** 240 mins We just lost our last excuse for being shit in Fight Club...
**UWE BOLL** 33 mins At least he's moved onto games that no-one gives a toss about
**BATHYSPHERES** 3 mins From the Greek 'bathus', meaning deep. 'Bathos' means an anticlimax. This was one of our duller conversations
**2ND SERIES OF THE IT CROWD** 29 mins Thank God Linehan's back on top form
**KANE** 100 mins And how Will managed to dominate a photo of a gaming legend with his big stupid thumbs
**BIOSHOCK** 511 mins Using Vita Chambers to slowly wear down a Big Daddy is rubbish
**BEARDS** 18 mins The retired colonel/major look gets some funny looks on the bus
**FARTYMOLOGY** 3 mins Will had never heard anyone use the word 'trump' to mean fart before he met Log. He's led a sheltered life
**NANDO'S REVIVAL** 50 mins We've regained our appetite for upsettingly spicy chicken (vegetarians excluded)

**WIN!** Why do the big boys tease you, Tiny Compo? You only want everyone to be happy, and to express the love that consumes you. You're so tiny they can't see your adoring face, and the blank incomprehension as you witness their cruel savagery. Truly, you are the saddest little compo in the world. Never mind – Tiny Compo 184 was won by Oliver Orchard from London; send this month's answers to Mel Gibson's Racist Outbursts Are Unacceptable, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Thanks a fat bunch, readers!

**GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS:** 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Parp parp!

# LETTERS

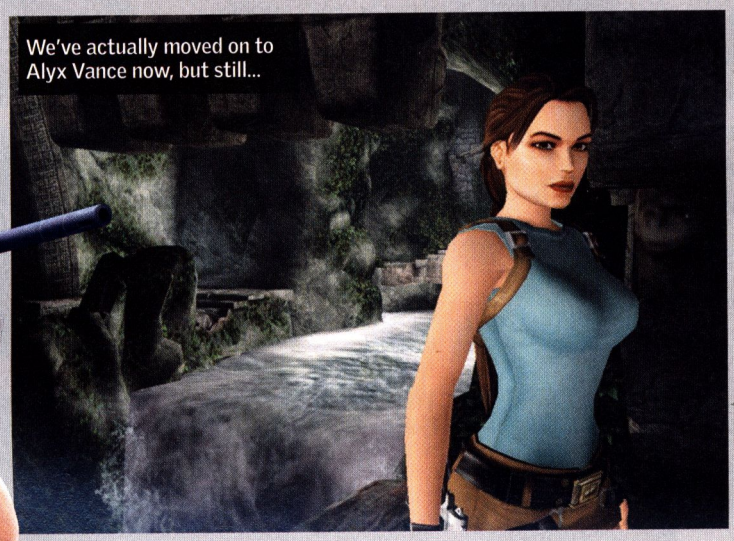






**_Jamie Sefton_ is a man of letters. _Your_ letters. Do you see what we did there...?**

## KING OF LETTERS


We've actually moved on to Alyx Vance now, but still...

### POSITIONS VACANT

Re: Deputy Art Editor position on *PC ZONE*.

I'm a single man with few interpersonal skills. Robert De Niro, in *Taxi Driver*, is my perfect role model. I live with my mother. I refer to the upstairs of her house as Level 2. I fancy Lara Croft. I have never opened my bedroom curtains. I once played *Unreal* for 14 hours non-stop.

I run the totally unofficial 'Britney Spears Nude' website. If I had a girlfriend, the only way I could see her naked would be with a cheat code. I seldom expose myself to sunlight. At meal times I stand on my food and 'power up'. I rarely eat vegetables. I helped create the 'Win a Holiday' virus, but was too smart to be caught.

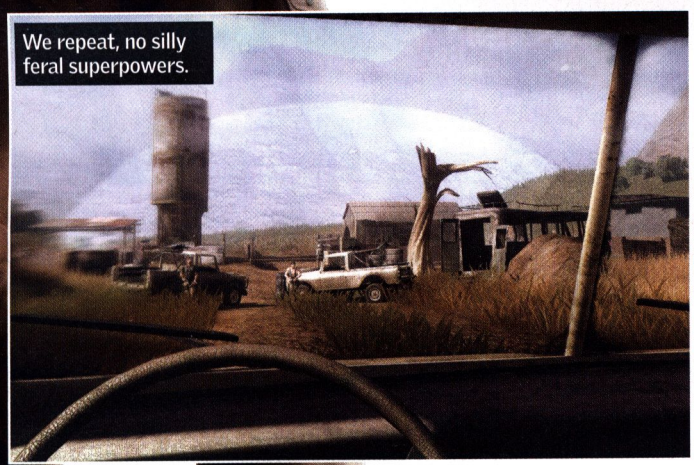
***Brian Jaye***

**You sad, sad bastard. When can you start?**

## WIN!



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We repeat, no silly feral superpowers.

### FAR CRYING OUT LOUD

I was very peeved when I read your 'Africa-bound' *Far Cry 2* preview. It was about the phrase "Jack Carver's silly feral superpowers". Jack Carver had no superpowers, just weapons and a special pair of binoculars. You really should have played the game. He is just a hunk who is a bit childish (see scene on moonlit beach after Val has kicked him in the head to get him off a helicopter with a dead pilot at the controls). Feral superpowers!

***John MacGregor***

**Aha! Well, John, as he said in the feature, young Steve was talking about the crappy console version *Far Cry: Instincts*, in which Jack was actually given stupid animalistic powers. For that, I'm afraid we have to set the Trigens on you.**

### HIGH PRAISE

First off, let me congratulate you on issue 184, which is undoubtedly the best *PC ZONE* to date! The Penny Arcade feature, the sci-fi feature (especially news on the new *Aliens* FPS/RPG), a news section bursting with some of the most interesting and upcoming games, *Oblivion* Jackass, a hilarious Supertest and huge Freeplay bit.

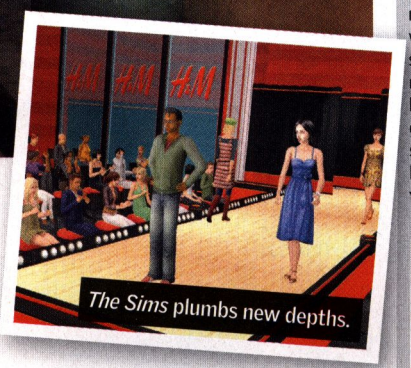
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*F.E.A.R.*: still worth grabbing if you missed it.

# I just want a shooter with 20 good levels to remove me from my sad life

Michael Watts demands more guns and less spells



*The Sims* plumbs new depths.

However, the best part of the whole mag had to be the review of *The Sims 2: H&M Fashion Stuff*. I was reduced to tears with laughter – never before have I witnessed a game receive such a scalding review, although don't for a second think that there's a doubt in my mind that it was deserved.

***Dave Nichols***

**Glad you liked the issue, Dave. Yeah, you can say we have a 'love-hate' relationship with *The Sims* – check out page 30 for the return of our *Sims*-free charts...**

## MICROSOFT CODE

I have just realised that behind all of Microsoft's operating system's names there may be subtle warnings about the system. NT stood for Never Touch. XP for Xtra Profit, and as for the latest one, VISTA? Well, that stands for Vastly Idiotic System To Annoy. Maybe people should consider this whenever Microsoft release a new system in the future?

***Russell Baldwin***

**Of course! It all makes sense now...**

## GOBLIN MY ARSE!

I find myself doing a lot of flicking through *PC ZONE* these days, searching for a decent shooter. All I see are MMORPGs, RTSs, orcs, trolls, runes and spells littering the pages. I don't want to go on a pointless quest, I don't want experience points, I don't want to sell my character on eBay to some faceless goon in Korea – I just want a shooter with 20 good levels to remove me from my sad life for a couple of weeks.

In the last three years, I can count on one hand the amount of shooters I have been excited about: *Far Cry*, *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*. Now I know you are going to throw all these team-based shooters at me like *SWAT*, *Battlefield 2142*, etc, but this is not what I want. I want to be a lone warrior fighting against the odds... I want to feel scared and excited, cornered and vindicated in my slaughter of the enemy. More shooters please, but good ones. And no fucking orcs!

***Michael Watts***

**Well said, Michael. Our first love on *PC ZONE* has always been shooters, and you won't be disappointed with the games on offer in the next few months – *BioShock* (has RPG elements, but still...), *Crysis* and *Call Of Duty 4* being the cream of the single-player crop. However, if you've never played them, *F.E.A.R.*, *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* and *Prey* are excellent blasters, all now on**

## YOUR SHOUT!

### SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

### OVERLORD

Sent in by Deryk Tolman

**PC ZONE score: 72%**

I first tried *Overlord* as a playable demo from *PC ZONE* (of course) and I thought it was very entertaining – my little minions running about, murdering helpless sheep. So I decided to buy the full version, but to my horror the game wasn't based on killing mindless fluffy creatures! I was so angry I went around killing everything I saw, then this screen appeared: "Congratulations! You have rebuilt your evil empire and punished those heroes!" But seriously, I think the game's great. Unfortunately there is no map, I've spent more time searching for the exit of some hole than actually completing the game.

**Your shout: 81%**


*Overlord*: mapless.

**Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words and a percentage score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.**



## ASK THE TXTPERTS

**Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the *PC ZONE* 'Txtperts' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...**

**Why take the *Guild Wars* franchise off the charts and put shit up there like *Hospital Tycoon*? Issue 184 charts.**

***S Grant***

Don't shoot the messenger, S. The great game-buying public (i.e. you) create the chart we print.

***STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl* – will it work with Vista? Thanks.**

***G Ashley***

A recent patch has improved *STALKER*'s Vista compatibility, but problems remain. Expect yet another Vista patch soon...

**Are there any sites I can find *Quake 3: Arena* mods and patches?**

***Another Quake Fan***

Yep – games.moddb.com. We'll have a round-up of the best ones next issue.



**Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.**

**By texting *PC ZONE* you're agreeing to receiving details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate.**




**budget and with no goblins guaranteed.**

## LEANING TOWER OF PCZ

I have attached a photograph of my *PC ZONE* collection. It starts at issue 36, March 1996 until present. I quite often refer back to older issues if I'm buying a budget game or older title. I've subscribed to your magazine since issue 38, and when I subscribed my free game was *X-Com: Terror From The Deep* on floppy disc, which I still have installed!

***Andrew Young***

**Top work, Andrew. A brand new game to hopefully replace *X-Com* on your machine is winging its way to you now as a reward for your undying loyalty to Britain's best PC mag!**

## TECHNO IGNORATI

I read Mr Neil Jary's spirited defence of Windows Vista in issue 184 – thanks for consigning the technical stuff to brackets, because I wouldn't have understood a word, being as I am a bit un-savvy with technology in general. That's why I'm writing this – to speak out for myself and all the other ignorant luddites out there for whom a shiny new OS is just a pain in the backside, because no matter how hard I try to resist I will, eventually, have to upgrade. And for a 'casual' gamer like me, that means forking out to Microsoft YET AGAIN, and spending boring, frustrating hours installing the damned thing, and I know full well I'll muck it up and lose all my games and/or music (unless it's meant to do that; I don't actually know). Constantly being ripped off is just one of the things I don't like about PC gaming, but there's loads more that I love that makes up for it. Let's keep it that way.

***Boris Chekhov***

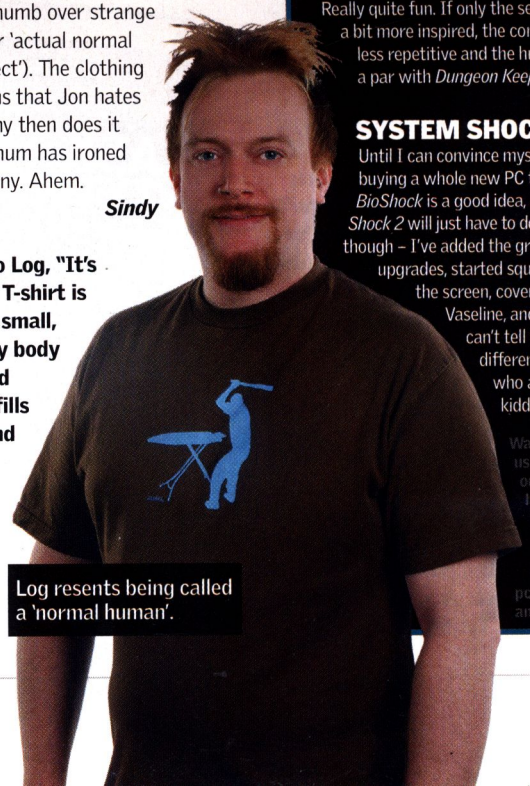
**At the moment, you can still play all the best PC games on XP – apart from *Halo 2* and *Shadowrun*, which aren't very good anyway. However, it'll be a different story next year, when XP won't be supported by Microsoft. Yes, it's a pain shifting to Vista, but at least you get the graphics boost of DX10 that makes PlayStation 3 look like a ZX Spectrum. *Crysis* will be worth the upgrade inconvenience, I promise you.**

## FASHION GURU

Log's new T-shirt means that he even manages to look like a normal human for once (place thumb over strange hair at top for 'actual normal bald man effect'). The clothing item proclaims that Jon hates ironing, so why then does it look like his mum has ironed it? Oh, the irony. Ahem.

***Sindy***

**According to Log, "It's because the T-shirt is one size too small, therefore my body naturally and organically fills the space and smooths creases around the clock – so you don't have to!"** PCZ


Log resents being called a 'normal human'.

## WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?



### QUAKE III: ARENA

**www.steampowered.com**

id Software's deathmatch classic is now on Steam – a nice excuse to install it again and enjoy a few frantic lunchtime frags.

### FULL PIPE

**pipestudio.ru/fullpipe/index.php**

A point-and-click adventure set in a world of haunting twilight horror. Don't question the world, just try to work out the rules that might apply in it.

### GISH

**www.chroniclogic.com**

A puzzle-platformer starring a blob of tar, where fluid physics and momentum reign supreme. A champion indie game.

## WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?



### THIS MONTH: ARCHIEUK (AKA SIMON TURNER)

### PEGGLE

Damn you, *PC ZONE*, for ever suggesting that *Peggle* is great fun. I now can't stop playing every spare few minutes in an effort to get that elusive 750,000 point score. That bloody rabbit never gives me triple score when I really need it!

### OVERLORD

Really quite fun. If only the setting was a bit more inspired, the combat a bit less repetitive and the humour on a par with *Dungeon Keeper*.

### SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Until I can convince myself that buying a whole new PC to play *BioShock* is a good idea, *System Shock 2* will just have to do. It's OK, though – I've added the graphical upgrades, started squinting at the screen, covered it with Vaseline, and now I can't tell the difference! Ah, who am I kidding...

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Visit the forums at www.pczone.co.uk and let rip.

## PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD




**We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!**








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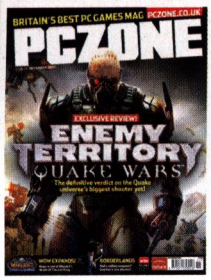
Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

COVER STORY

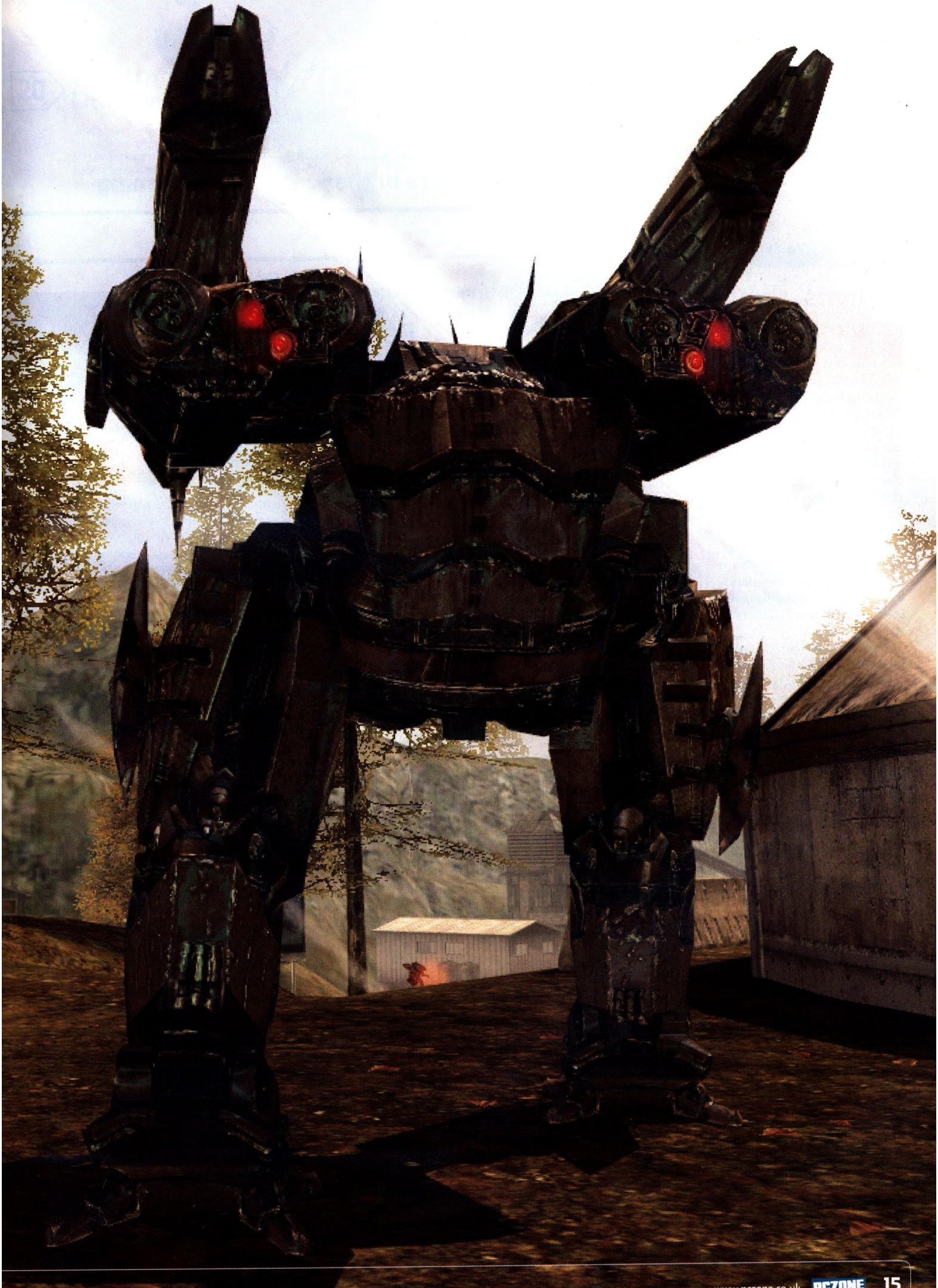
# ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

**They took their time, but the Strogg have finally touched down. We find out whether their cruel and globally destructive invasion was worth the wait...**




**THE BEST THING** about an alien invasion is the fact that we'd have the home advantage. We'd hide behind pyramids, set traps on mountains those alien bastards had never even heard of, and push them into ravines and canyons while they tried to decipher signposts and AA maps. *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* is finally here, and while it doesn't let you push the Strogg over cliffs, it does let you drive over them in tanks. But, in the name of balance, they can stomp on you with the titanium feet of Johnny Mechpants here. How does it compare to the original *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*? Will it convert *Battlefield* players? If a Strogg sneezed would its metal face fly across the room? All is revealed in our review.

PAGE 62







# UPFRONT

**Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming**

## Pedants' club

**IT MIGHT BE** the best game ever, but *BioShock* gets a lot of things really wrong, and I'm ashamed to say I was forced to omit these glaring errors from my review last issue. For a start, you've got this blue whale arsing about around Rapture in the opening sequence. Let me tell you, blue whales don't go to the bottom of the sea very often. You know what happens to cups at the bottom of the sea? They crumple. Imagine a whale, with a lung capacity of 5,000 litres, *crumpling*. You can't, that's why they don't go down there. Nice try, Levine. You might look like David Duchovny but you possess none of his investigative skills.

Secondly, and this one really annoys me, if there's a crack in the glass wall of a room four kilometres below the surface of the sea, the ocean won't happily flounce in like a garden sprinkler on a hot summer's afternoon. That shit will blast right through like a high-pressure hose. Honestly, it would rip your face off. I once saw a crab being sucked through a hole the size of a toothpick, all because of water pressure. Imagine a crab being sucked through a hole the size of a toothpick. Can you? Ken Levine can't.

Finally, I don't know what kind of fish they have over there at Irrational (now called 2K Austraboston-shire), but over here in the UK, our fish die. They drown in the air. *BioShock's* fish flap around in puddles forever. Are a few dead fish too extreme for your murder-simulator, Ken? And to think we rated *BioShock* a Classic...

Steve Hogarty

**Steve Hogarty, section editor**

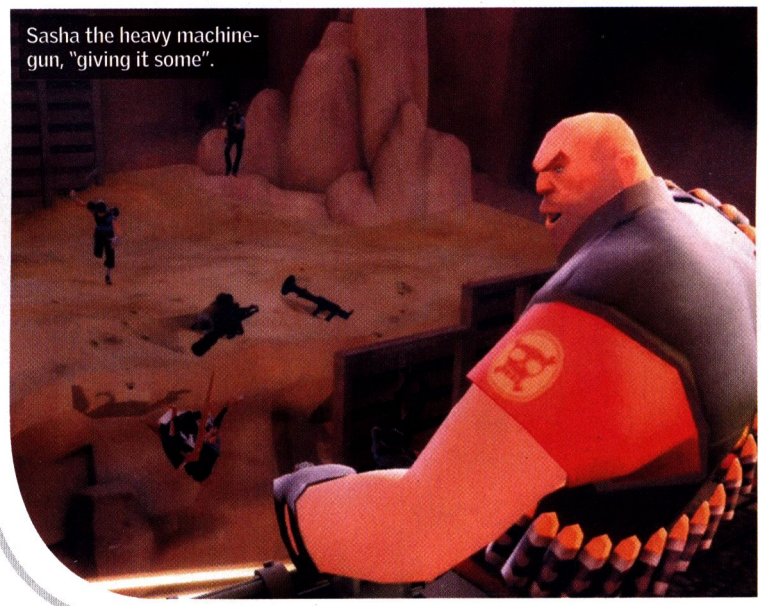
# GIFT OF THE GABE

## *PCZ* enter conversation with Gabe Newell, the man who wields the crowbar around the Valve Software HQ

**So, Steam seems to have conquered the known world – what next?**
"The way we think about it is that we've spent a fair amount of time thinking what we, as a developer, would want out of Steam, and making sure that we do a good job for other game developers. I think that's why there's a good 150 games now on it. The area we want to focus on now is starting to make it a bit more valuable for gamers, and the community stuff is a part of that. We want to focus on making the social experience of gaming better, giving people more tools to do that – inviting friends, managing clans and so on... Basically making it all more valuable for gamers, when in the past we've been focussed on making it more valuable for developers."

**What would you say is Valve's favourite non-Valve game on there?**
"One of the funny things is that we have a community group of our own at Valve, and right up there at number two on the developers playing list was *Peggle*! We had to ban *BioShock* – no-one in the company is allowed to play it until they finish Orange Box. That's their reward!"

**With the simultaneous console release of the Orange Box, is the PC still the Valve home platform?**
"Yes. I think the PC is where a lot of the most interesting innovations are happening, and where the most interesting CPUs are... It's not that surprising that this new generation of consoles are all using PC graphics – it's where all the good work is being done. The one area where the PC is behind, from a developer's point of view, is in the work Nintendo has done with input. There's just not really a corresponding course for the PC industry to do innovative work there. It's something that's really missing on the PC side – people just assume it's always mouse and keyboard. It's great, obviously, for games like ours; but for the opportunity of doing something new, there's just not a good coalition of software and hardware developers in the PC space to make it happen."



Sasha the heavy machine-gun, "giving it some".

**In terms of storyline, how far ahead does the *HL* roadmap go?**
"It's a technique similar to what's used with TV shows, where you have a bible. So it structures the past and the future. When you actually ship a game you fill in a lot of details, and maybe find out there are better ways of telling the story, but the plot has been known for a while..."

**So if there was one moment from the *Half-Life* series you could freeze-frame, that represents where you completely 'nailed it', what would it be?**
"I think when you're playing catch with Dog with the gravity gun. That was where a bunch of things came together. I think we were just really happy about how that turned out. Even though there's no big explosions and nobody getting shot, you're still having a really great experience. I'm also really proud with the ending of *Portal*, I think it's probably the strongest ending we've had yet with any of our games."

**STOP PRESS!**

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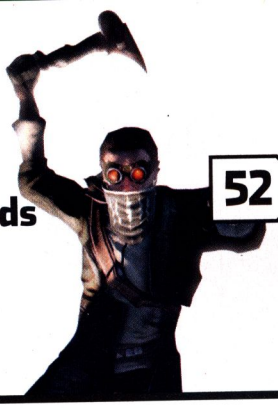
**BURNOUT ON PC?**
Rumours are flying that arcade racer *Burnout* is finally coming to PC. We love *Burnout*, as well as irresponsible driving.

**KANE'S WRATH**
The new *C&C3* expansion, *Kane's Wrath*, will take place (chronologically speaking) between *Tiberian Sun* and *C&C3*. More next issue.



**20 Wrath Of The Lich King**

Wrath means anger, lich means corpse, and king means king! All the Angry Corpse King info you need is here.



**32 Borderlands**

It's the end of the world as we know it, and *Borderlands* feels fine.



**52 Operation Flashpoint 2**

Ultra-realistic shoot-you-in-the-face-from-two-miles-away military action is back, and it's going to shoot you in the face.




Bunker, forest, stormtroopers – it's the bloody Battle of Endor!



*Portal*: best ending ever, reckons Gabe.



The Heavy and the Soldier both had monologues in *TF2*'s trailers.



Nice puppies. Or are they Asura?

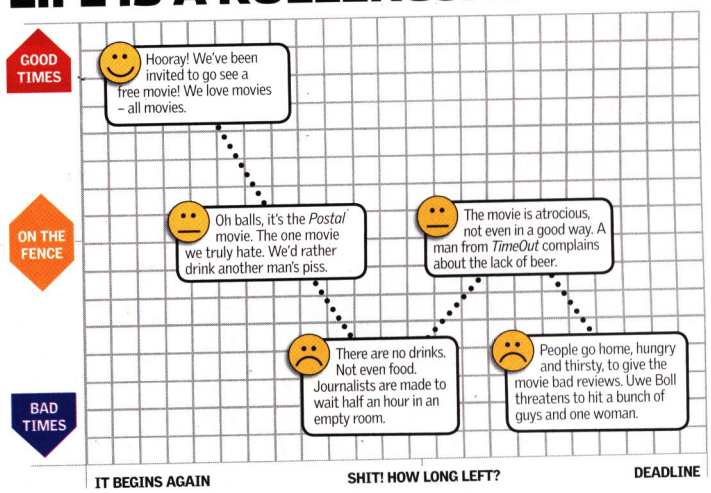
# Golden tickets

## *Guild Wars*: Exclusive! 1,000 pets to be won, only in next month's *PC ZONE*

**THE NEXT ISSUE** of *PC ZONE* will be nigh on magical, with 1,000 bronze, silver and gold tickets to be won, and subsequently cashed in for *Guild Wars* in-game mini-pets – better than a trip to a suspiciously eccentric hermit's confectionery paradise any day. A bronze ticket nets you a Grawl, Longhair Yeti, Naga Raincaller, or Oni. A silver gets you a Shiro'ken Assassin or Zhed Shadowhoof. And the ultra-rare gold tickets, of which there are a mere handful, grant you a Miniature Vizu. Shake the packaging if you want to try and guess what's inside – is it a DVD? Is it a pet? Find out on October 11.

**STUFF** **Exchange rates – simple things. One pound is, right now, worth about two dollars. In America, *Hellgate: London's* optional subscription fee is $9.99 a month. So you'd imagine that – NO WAIT, YOU'RE WRONG. Brits will have to cough up £6.99 a month. That's more than *anybody else*. That's $14. The rest of Europe will have to pay €9.99, which is about $13.60. Of course, this is optional, but still, if you set a game in our horrible capital, at least don't rip us off.**

# LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



# QUALITY STREET

## Nothing irks more than a bug-ridden game. So has QA gone to the dogs?





**Reporter**
Pavel Barter

**BUGS. GROTTY LITTLE** cretins that lodge in your windpipe, frighten girls and ruin family picnics. Eat your greens like your mother told you to and bugs are kept at bay – the medically related ones, at least – but even a prize cauliflower would wither in the face of a digital creepy-crawly, which can cause games to crash and characters to morph into lamp posts. It's not only end users who gnash their teeth in frustration; developers also scream "D'oh!" when quality assurance (QA) goes pear-shaped.

"The one that really nailed us was when we shipped *Matrix: Path Of Neo* and the McAfee virus killer incorrectly identified the game as a virus," says developer Dave Perry. "Needless to say, people were freaking out, thinking the game contained some old virus from the '90s, when it was McAfee simply getting it wrong. That was painful and too late when discovered."

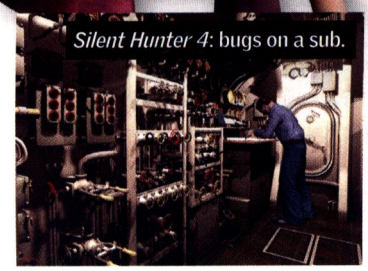
Bugs have been around since the dawn of computer technology. In 1947, a Harvard University boffin was trying to fix a primitive machine that was acting up. As it turned out, a moth had become lodged inside the device, leading him to make an entry in his log – "First actual case of bug being found" – and enabling games journalists to make pun-riffic jibes about insects for decades to come.

### IT'S A BUGGY LIFE

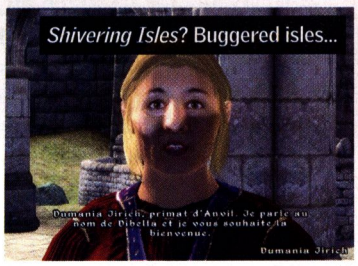
In this day and age, bugs and boo-boos are depressingly commonplace in PC games – from *Vampire: The Masquerade*'s stuttering cadaver of an engine to *Oblivion* expansion *Shivering Isles* and its vanishing objects. Both games were treated with patches, but – let's face it – a bandage is meagre compensation after getting stabbed in the ribs. Even the finest games have their share of hiccups – randomly floating characters, wonky physics, motionless guards. But why so?

"All software releases have bugs, and no program is ever bug-free," explains Californian games tester Zachary J Slater, who has tinkered with such titles as *Halo 2*, *Doom 3*, *Quake 4*, *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* and *Soldier Of Fortune*. "The more variables there are in a piece of software, the more bugs will pop up. For example, a cellphone game could conceivably have far fewer possible bugs than a larger, more complex game like *Unreal Tournament*. Think of how many weapons are in a first-person shooter, and how many different situations you could get into with those weapons. You can't possibly think of every situation, especially in multiplayer games. All you can do is mitigate the bugs, taking care of as many serious issues as possible. It's all about the math of money, testers and time to create a game with as few bugs as possible."

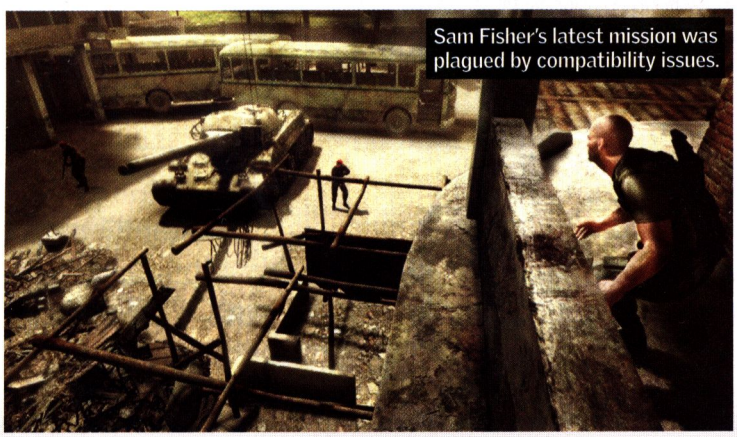
Some developers reckon it's partly the fault of gamers. Perry explains: "Complete



*Silent Hunter 4*: bugs on a sub.



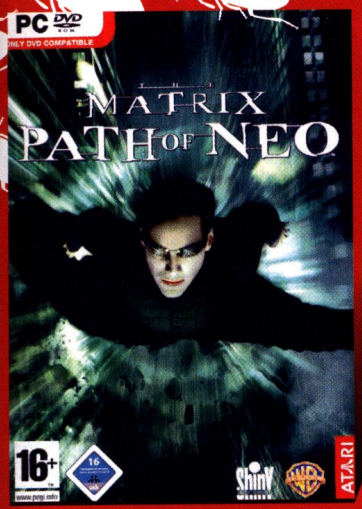

*Shivering Isles*? Buggered isles...



Sam Fisher's latest mission was plagued by compatibility issues.



*Test Drive Unlimited*: we're still waiting on a patch to remove gormless idiots.







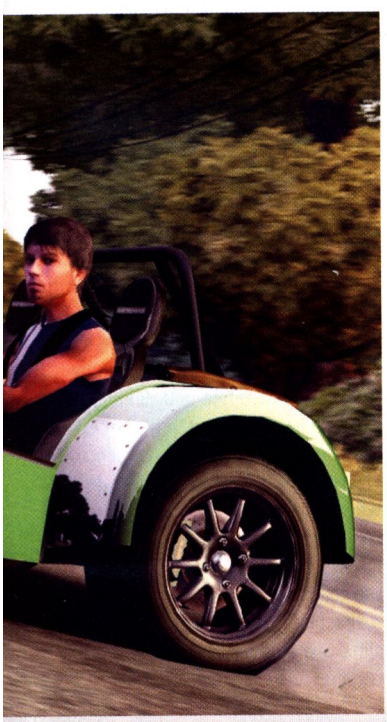
testing is almost impossible, as there are so many people out there, in so many countries, with so many configurations. They'll say, 'Your damn game won't install properly!' You then find out that the dude has 16 CD-ROM drives installed. Yep, we never tested that."

## CUTTING CORNERS?

Nevertheless, buggy games seem more prevalent today than ever before, and certain publishers are in the firing line. Three recent Ubisoft titles are especially flaky on PC: *Silent Hunter 4: Wolves Of The Pacific*, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* and *Resident Evil 4*. Bombarded by customer complaints, Ubisoft issued patches for all three, but it didn't do much to calm tempers. Buy a new car and you expect it to work 100 per cent – why not the same with games?

"Big publishers spend as little time as possible on QA – enough to meet console compliance and their internal processes for PC games, while still retaining the day-one buyers in general," says Slater the tester. "Strangely, the people who buy the game months down the road will have a better experience, due to patches and additional (often free) content. You'll notice the complete opposite from smaller companies like id, Epic and Valve. They have to go the extra mile because their reputations are at stake, but something like EA's *Madden* franchise is large enough that it can get by on name alone."

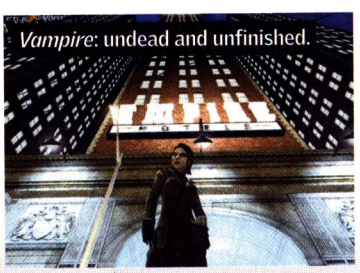
Atari QA spent "a total of 10,000 hours testing *Test Drive Unlimited* on PC, plus two rounds of public beta testing", according to producer Maxime Loppin. But you wouldn't know it from the army of enraged fans standing at the foot of Atari's hill with burning torches. From cars hopping about of their own accord to motorbikes reaching 500kph in first gear, YouTube is awash with amusing *TDU* cock-ups. Fans aren't amused, mind. Some are even calling for a mass refund.



## TESTING TIMES

Loppin, however, says the criticisms aren't valid. "A combination of software bugs, server issues, driver issues, compatibility issues and so on can result in the game appearing this way, but in reality, *TDU* isn't a buggy game. This is a PC game (which instantly means an infinite number of hardware combinations), it's set on a massive island and it has massive online capability, with very innovative online features. This combination of parameters makes it really difficult to test, but that doesn't mean *TDU* PC wasn't thoroughly tested – it was.

"*TDU* was released with no serious bugs flagged by QA, nor by end users, except for the bug linked with NVIDIA drivers, which we have relentlessly sought to solve with NVIDIA. Some unexpected issues appeared when the game was released to the public – in other words, when hundreds of thousands of players started to interact with other players, objects and game data. The majority of new issues appeared as a direct result of the massive amount of players playing at the same time, a situation that was impossible to simulate in QA. After the game's release, we continued working hard to sort out problems which arose, and we recently released a patch that has dealt with a number of issues."


*Vampire*: undead and unfinished.

QA has nonetheless become a serious issue for the industry. Consider Ubisoft's release of a Nintendo DS game that featured the term "Super Spastic". Cue instant furore and product recall. Not exactly a win-win situation, eh?

Dave Perry, who's currently working on an MMO dancing game with Acclaim, thinks that in the future, titles will have a wider assortment of QA testers, with more closed-beta and open-beta builds for the community, special test builds for 'friendly' hackers, more 'Kleenex' testing (an EA phrase), so that testers only play a game once and are then thrown away like dirty bog roll, and the addition of auto-testing bots. But can we expect a bug-free future? Not likely, alas. "I don't envisage a future where it's going to get any easier," says Perry. "If anything, with the complexity of games increasing, it's really going to test the testers." PCZ

**Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)**

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ pavel barter, pc zone, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

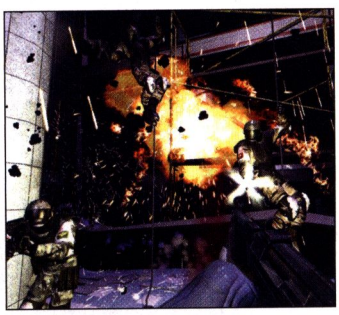
# Crash test dummies

**How to ensure a game isn't bollocks, in three easy steps...**



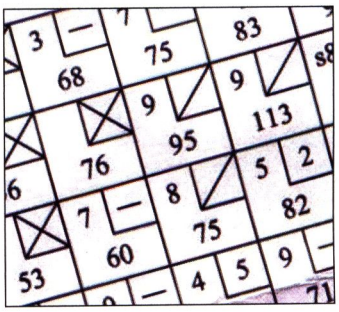
### Stay compliant

Zachary J Slater, professional games tester: "When working on compliance, a tester will focus on one specific area of the game, checking for the correct volume levels, filling hard drives and doing very little gameplay. Game bugs, lock-ups and such are incidental during compliance testing. Of course, they're still reported, but they aren't the focus."



### Plan ahead

Francois Anjuli, QA team, TimeGate (*F.E.A.R. Extraction Point*, *Axis & Allies*): "The first step in our testing procedure is to read the associated 'test plan', a step-by-step instruction sheet for testing a particular asset. With this document, the tester will understand the expected behaviour. We have checklists for everything from levels to specific features."

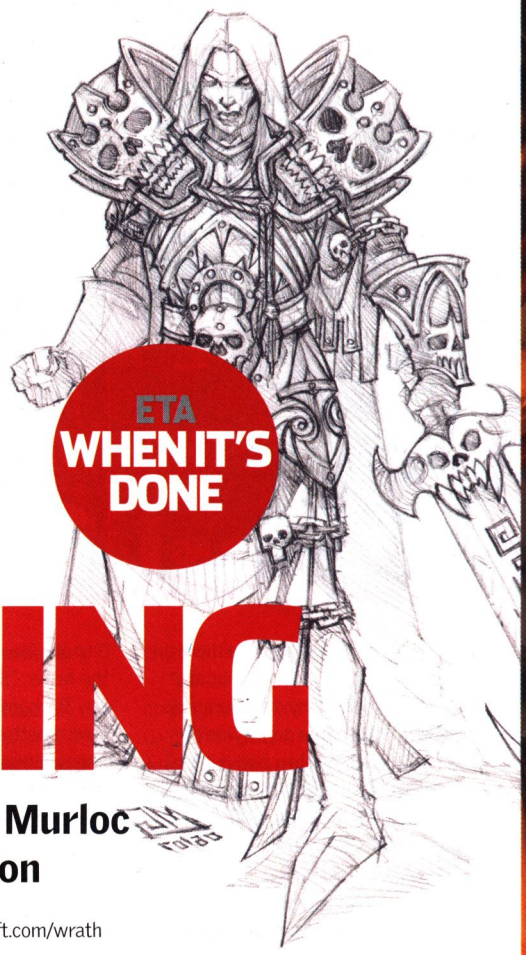


### Get grading

Anjuli: "Once an asset has been tested, it's then graded on a QA scorecard, and bugs are added to the defect-tracking database. The information provided by the scorecard is used by the QA manager to determine what should be fixed first, and the bugs are reassigned in the database to a developer. This process is repeated for every component of a game."

**"All software releases have bugs, and no program is ever bug-free"**

Zachary J Slater, professional games tester



## NORTHREND EXPOSURE...

# WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

**ETA WHEN IT'S DONE**

***Oli Welsh* went to BlizzCon, and all he got was this lousy Murloc suit. Oh, and a playtest of Blizzard's latest *WOW* expansion**

**THE LOWDOWN**

- Nobody builds more exciting worlds to explore ✓
- Intriguing Death Knight hero class ✓
- Walrus-men. Giant moose. Angry Vikings. Arthas ✓
- The mood for dancing, romancing. And... haircuts? ✓
- No new races this time. Boo! ✗

**DEVELOPER** Blizzard **PUBLISHER** Vivendi **WEBSITE** www.worldofwarcraft.com/wrath

**IT'S DAY ONE** of the second BlizzCon in Los Angeles. Warlocks, elves and a particularly shaggy owlbeast are ambling around a convention centre next door to Disneyland, posing for photos. Korean mentalists are playing *StarCraft* at a rate of 300 actions per minute. In the main hall, the second *World Of Warcraft* expansion *Wrath Of The Lich King* is being announced, and the several thousand people present are going, for the want of a better word, batshit. This despite the fact that the majority of them must have read this news when it leaked on to the Internet two days ago. BlizzCon has that effect on people. *World Of Warcraft* has that effect on people. And to some extent, Arthas Menethil has that effect on people.

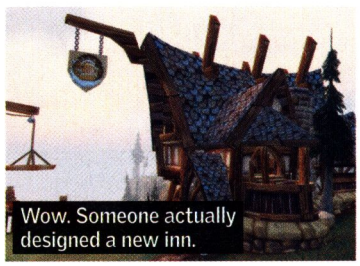


The spooky town of New Agamand in Howling Fjord.

Those of you who played Blizzard's RTS classic *Warcraft III* will know that Arthas was a human crown prince who fell under the spell of the undead Scourge, and became one of its Death Knights. Ultimately he fused with the necromancer Kel'Thuzad to become the Scourge's terrifying Lich King. This pretty much makes him an Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader who went on to become Emperor but never lost his looks. It's probably the most compelling and well-told story in the *Warcraft* universe, and he's many fans' favourite character. He's certainly Blizzard's favourite.

"We're more excited about *Wrath Of The Lich King* than anything else we've worked on," explains *WOW's* amiably crazed lead designer Jeff Kaplan, alias Tigole, a former *EverQuest* guild master recruited by Blizzard. "Arthas is our boy, you know?"

Kaplan is determined to make him the star of the new *WOW* expansion, something he acknowledges they failed to do with Illidan, the villain of *The Burning Crusade*. He promises that, rather than just being a remote end boss that only hardcore raiding fanatics will see, the Lich King will make his presence felt by all players, from the moment they set foot on his turf, Northrend. We don't know how exactly, but we suspect he'll follow them around and somersault over their heads while yelling "LOL NOOBZ" in general chat. Or something to that effect.



Wow. Someone actually designed a new inn.

You'll also be able to get under Arthas' skin by following in his footsteps and becoming a Death Knight yourself. But more on that later, because you've got ten new levels – the level cap is being raised to 80 – and a whole continent to fight across before you can get that far.

## COLD EXTREMITIES

That continent is Northrend, Azeroth's chilly northern landmass. In a new twist, you'll have the choice of two entry points to Northrend and two different starting zones: Howling Fjord in the east and Borean Tundra in the west. Blizzard is doing this partly to ease stress on the servers, but also to encourage players to take the trip twice. "Our technology team was pretty freaked out that there was going to be one zone that all the players funnelled into with *Burning Crusade*," says Kaplan. "It also makes for a better experience, as you can choose where you want to explore first. And when you bring that second character up, you can choose the other zone."

We got to explore Howling Fjord in the hands-on demo. It's an area of high, rolling plateaus hanging over dizzying cliffs, and the location of the Utgarde Keep instance. The Keep is the impressive stronghold of

## THE STORY SO FAR...
# BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

**The Lost Vikings**
Could this SNES platformer have influenced the Vrykul? No, probably not.

1992




**The Lost Vikings II**
There just aren't enough Vikings in modern computer gaming.

1995

**Warcraft III**
The game that gave us Arthas, and the best storytelling in an RTS, ever.

2002

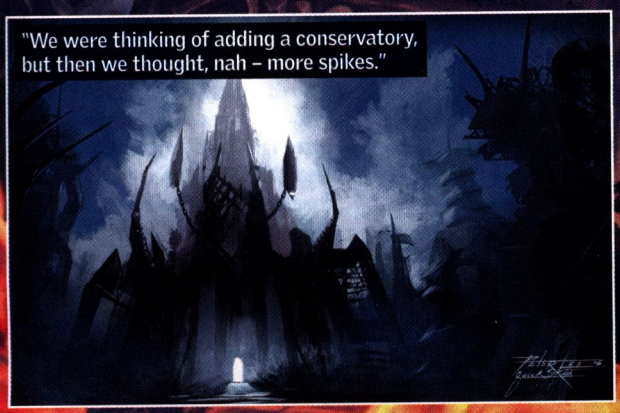


**World Of Warcraft**
Nine million players. That's larger than half the countries in the world. Really.

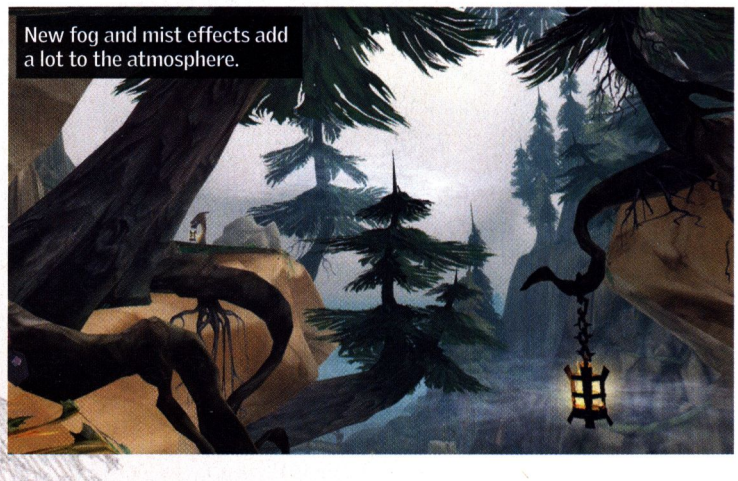
2004


A pleasant little town, apart from the giant marauding Vikings...

**You'll be able to follow in Arthas' footsteps and become a Death Knight**


"We were thinking of adding a conservatory, but then we thought, nah – more spikes."




New fog and mist effects add a lot to the atmosphere.

## Patchy growth

**What's coming your way before the second expansion hits**


Zul'Aman: troll town.

*Wrath Of The Lich King* naturally dominated *WOW* talk at BlizzCon, but Blizzard did discuss a few of the things that will turn up in regular content updates before the expansion's release. Following the success of Karazhan comes another ten-man instance, Zul'Aman, home of the forest trolls. There will be a further, undisclosed raid zone later on.

Integrated voice chat is also coming (no more Teamspeak bills!), as are guild banks (no more embezzling and infighting! Well, maybe). Most interestingly, there's going to be a revision of the original 1-60 levelling process, including new content and faster progress. "We're actually going back and trying to fix a lot of the old zones to make them better," says Jeff Kaplan. "In the upcoming patch we've added a ton of new quests to Dustwallow Marsh. We're also going to look at easing up the levelling curve a bit, in particular levels 20 to about 55 or 60 – that seems to be the sticking point for a lot of people."


There are some impressive new architectural styles on show.

the Vrykul, a race of brutal Viking giants. We also saw clips of three other zones: the unstable Borean Tundra, with its lovable Tuskarr walrus-men; the forests of Grizzly Hills, home of the Furbolgs; and Dragonblight, a treacherous wilderness of ice where another major adversary – the Blue Dragonflight – resides.

### MOOSE!

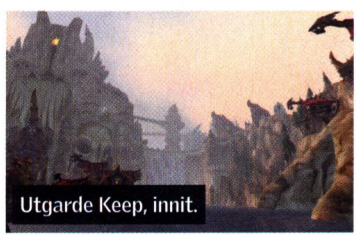
As we have come to expect from Blizzard, it's all stunningly beautiful, full of character and dramatically staged (players sail into the Fjord in the shadow of burning ships suspended from cliffs). Naturally, they've also populated Northrend with all manner of wondrous and freakish monsters to mash. We were particularly fond of the mammoth-sized moose with sad human faces, although not fond enough to stop killing them.

Not many quests were in place yet in the demo, but going by those that did feature, *Wrath Of The Lich King* is going to pitch you into a warzone even more effectively than *Burning Crusade* did. Arriving by boat, we were immediately asked to go and help repel the Vrykul assault on the port. In essence it was just another 'kill x of y' mission – but when you're standing at the gates, hip-deep in corpses, and constantly being charged by 12-foot-tall, axe-wielding Norsemen, who cares? Another quest had us bombing galleons from aboard an airship, in a scene that was more 'Jules Verne does the Napoleonic Wars' than the usual 'Tolkein does pest control'.

That said, Northrend is more traditional than *The Burning Crusade's* surreal Outland. It has an epic, high-fantasy feel that will make you nostalgic for your first adventures in Azeroth. "It's so beautiful, it's so rich with history and there are so many cool new races we're going to introduce," enthuses Kaplan. He's also keen to point out that it's not all snowscapes, and that it will probably be larger than Outland, thanks to them not having to create starting zones for new races this time out. The map we saw at BlizzCon indicated ten zones in total.

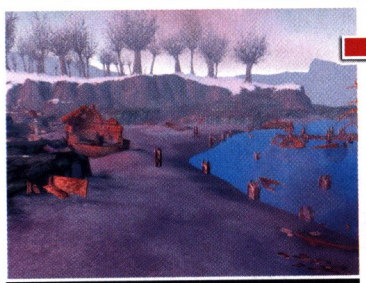
### SNOWBALL FIGHT

One of these will be Lake Wintergrasp, a new style of zone dedicated entirely to mass player-versus-player combat between Horde and Alliance. Along with a new battleground, it will show off the promised (but as-yet-unseen) PvP siege weapons and destructible buildings. Kaplan admits that Lake Wintergrasp is an attempt to give *WOW's* dodo-dead 'outdoor' PvP scene a kick up the arse.


Utgarde Keep, innit.

## Wrath of the tour guide

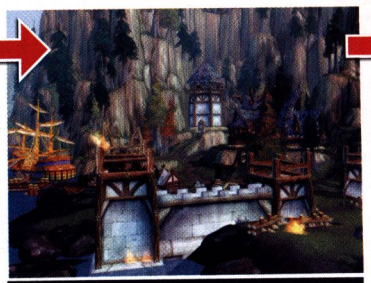
**A comprehensive visitor's guide to the sights and sounds of Northrend (except for all the bits we don't know about yet)**



See the majesty of the Borean Tundra before the Naga ruin it! The Easter Island-style Tuskarr statues are a must-see for any traveller.



Escape the snow with a trip to the verdant forests of Grizzly Hills! Its ancient Dwarven city is well worth the long trek.



This thriving Howling Fjord port is the gateway to Northrend. The lively local Vrykul warriors certainly spice up the nightlife!

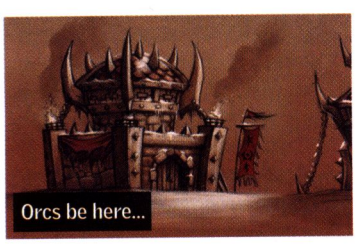


The sleepy Vrykul village of Nifflevar in Howling Fjord. Visit this charming settlement to indulge in the local pastimes of murder and pillage.

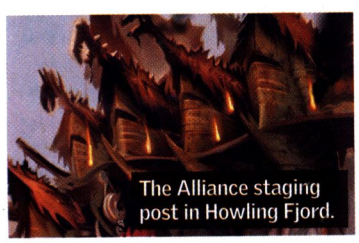
"*Burning Crusade* had a lot of world PvP experiments, and they all kind of clicked in their own way, but they didn't click together as a cohesive system," he confesses. "So we're hoping to take the lessons that we learned from all of those and really put them in a big experience in Northrend, right bang in the middle of the continent." Lake Wintergrasp will be adjacent to the new capital city, Dalaran, a mage's paradise transported from its original home in the Eastern Kingdoms, and now flying above Northrend.

### SEASONED WEEPING

Kaplan's really happy with *The Burning Crusade's* instances, so *Lich King* will feature a similar mix of five, ten and 25-player dungeon-crawling at normal and heroic settings, albeit without the insane difficulty levels that had even seasoned raiders weeping into their hotkeys. "The thing I was happiest with was the ten-person raid. That was a huge success with players," he says. "One thing I'm not happy with is that we tuned some of the content to be too difficult, and I'd like to do a better job of easing players into raiding. Also, some of our attunement requirements were too stringent."



Orcs be here...



The Alliance staging post in Howling Fjord.

**If this doesn't involve orcs in leg-warmers doing the intro to *Fame*, we don't want to hear about it**

It goes without saying that there'll be a new trade to learn: Inscription, which will permanently enhance spells and abilities. The examples given – adding a knock-on effect to a mage's fireball, say, or reducing spell cooldown times – sound very much like *WOW's* talent-tree improvements, which would make them pretty essential. So get ready to learn it, or to start paying some hard-earned (or sneakily bought) gold to those that do.

### BADASS ZOMBIE

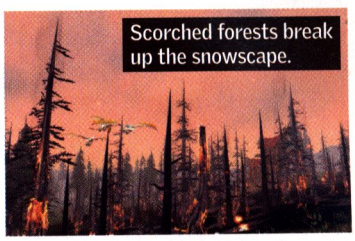
But if you asked a *WOW* fan what really cranks his tractor about *Wrath Of The Lich King*, it wouldn't be any of the above. It would be the first new class in *WOW* history, and the first Hero Class: the Death Knight.

Available in any racial flavour (yes, even gnomes), the Death Knight is basically a magical undead warrior: a plate-armoured, dual-wielding, army-of-skeletons-summoning, badass zombie. You'll only be able to create one by completing a quest at level 80, but it will start at a high level (somewhere in the 55-70 range). Although at pains to point out that it won't be more powerful than existing classes, Kaplan says the Death Knight will feel different in several ways.

"One is the means by which you obtain the class. It's going to be unlocked through a really epic quest that tells the story of what this class is," he says. "He'll feel a lot more aggressive in his stance when he's tanking, with no shield. He also has a whole new resource system,



Dragon-headed lifts take you up these cliffs from the sea.



Scorched forests break up the snowscape.



runes, which means he can customise what abilities he can use at any particular time." Runes come in three mix-and-match flavours, allotted to the six rune slots on your weapon.

One more little detail before we go. In *Wrath Of The Lich King*, your character will be able to go to the hairdresser. It may sound silly, but anyone who's been regretting that purple topknot for two and a half years and 70 levels would definitely say otherwise. And as if that weren't enough, you'll also be able to customise your dance moves. If this feature doesn't involve a rhythm-action game with orcs in leg-warmers doing the intro to *Fame*, we don't want to hear about it, okay Blizzard?

*Wrath Of The Lich King* is not as exciting or game-changing a prospect as *The Burning Crusade* was. But it is shaping up to be a stirring adventure, an automatic purchase for the *WOW* faithful, and another reason to be curious for the rest. It will be out "when it's done." Take your time, lads. There's only nine million of us waiting. PCZ

# ARGUE THE TOSS

THIS MONTH:

## MOTION BLUR

**Dear Steve,**
OK, so my latest big gripe is motion blur. What's the point? I bought a swanky graphics card, and now *Far Cry 2*, *Crysis* et al are ruining my lovely graphics with swishy nonsense? To me it seems completely unnecessary – a repeat of the days when game developers sprinkled lens flare on every light source they could find. I want to see every little detail on my alien foe, not a brown swoosh of eyes and teeth.
Will Porter

**Dear Will,**
A brown swoosh of eyes and teeth is all you'd see if aliens really did exist, and weren't just an invention of God-hating anarchists. Motion blur is an actual, real thing that happens when something moves at speed on camera – just watch the *Transformers* movie and count how many blurry metal appendages fly about. It's all about realism, Will, and you can't stand in the way of pure reality.
Steve Hogarty

**Steve,**
I won't stand for this. One of the primary reasons that *Transformers* was such a hulking lump of shit was because there were so many blurry metal appendages that you didn't know what the hell was going on. If I wanted my games blurry, I'd play when drinking, crying or both. I spent God knows how much on this machine, and I fully intend to stare at how detailed things are for as long as I possibly can.
WP

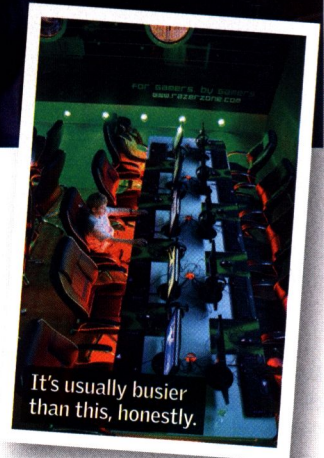
**Will,**
Okay, maybe *Transformers* was a bad example, but what about *Lost Planet*? That's got nice motion blur on the aliens who turn into armadillo things and roll around. They wouldn't be nearly as cool without the blurring, and *Crysis* uses the blur to emphasise the speed at which alien tentacles are flying about. It makes things more cinematic as long as it's done right. But like HDR, we have to give it time to mature.
SH

**Steve,**
OK. So I'm being brought around to this little by little. And another counter-Will argument, I suppose, is that grumpy sods like me can presumably turn it off at the flick of a switch. But can we at least agree that games publishers should stop churning out screenshots lathered in motion blur? It makes everything look silly – like you're supposed to be shaking your head while looking at them. Can I still be angry about that?
WP

**Will,**
Yeah, fair enough. Those *Far Cry 2* screenshots looked like what my cataract-ridden nan would see if she went to Africa.
SH



Omega Sektor's Adrian Le Mans has a bit of a speech.



It's usually busier than this, honestly.

# ARCADE REVIVAL

## Brummie game-opolis Omega Sektor opens its doors

www.omegasektor.com

**NOTTINGHAM HAS ROBIN HOOD,** Halifax has a building society and maintains that Nottingham stole Robin Hood from them, but what does Birmingham have? Lenny Henry? He's not even from Birmingham.

No, the true jewel in Birmingham's crown is the newly opened Omega Sektor, a huge gaming centre featuring 440 gaming PCs on two floors, with cafes and bars serving drinks that'll inevitably be spilt on keyboards. It has rooms for *STALKER*, *Quake 4*, *Final Fantasy XI*, *Call Of Duty 2*, *Quake Wars*, 'the internet' and pretty much any other game you might want to play. And all on top-spec machines, too. They even serve beer, and the whole place is suitably dark and bassy. Will such a crude melding of multiplayer PC gaming and socialising with peers in physical space actually work? Apparently it does, and there'll be an Omega Sektor opening in London before you can say "multiplayer gaming works over the net too, you know".

# TAKE ME DOWN



Bunting: big in the ghetto.

## *Escape From Paradise City* is more guns than roses

www.paradisecity-thegame.com | ETA: October 19

**CRITICISM OF A GAME** can sometimes act like a powerful sandblaster, reducing it and refining it into something better. *Gangland* was a mucky title, a strategy-adventure lark in a mafia-ruled city with enough problems to fill a big bucket of mediocrity. Sequel *Escape From Paradise City* could well be fixing those problems.

You operate from a lofty RTS viewpoint, commanding your characters about the city environments and subverting local crime bosses to win territory, then switching to an over-the-shoulder camera to get a better look at what's going down on the streets. With three undercover government agents under your control, you can amass enough power to call in air strikes or simply train your characters up RPG-style. Give them abilities such as Leg Shot (read 'kneecap') and you can slow enemy movement. So far, so straightforward, but Sirius claims to be stuffing *Paradise City* with a few interesting ideas, and *Gangland* wasn't such a horrible game to begin with. One to watch.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

# The man who's grinding our Gears



**CLIFF BLESZINSKI – LEAD GAME DESIGNER ON GEARS OF WAR**

**BETTER KNOWN AS** CliffyB, the man responsible for *Jazz Jackrabbit*, several slices of *UT* and the continuing adventures of Marcus Fenix is the closest we've got to a gaming-development celebrity. Admittedly, there are other contenders, but most come across as friendly-uncle types – and Cliffy has cooler hair and swears a bit.



Wrought iron chains, model's own.

**Q Having played the game on PC, it's amazing how you get such a feeling of weight and grit into the keyboard and mouse controls...**

**A** "Yeah. For me it's like a recipe – all the ingredients coming together to give you a flavour that really works well. For a start, the character looks big and bulky and doesn't just walk up to cover and stand next to it – he dives like his life counts on it. As it does! You've also got to have that right sound, of metal hitting the wall, and have the screen shake at just the right time; it adds to the feeling of heaviness of the character. He moves with a sense of weight – that's where we're going with the game's pacing. A slightly slower, more methodical pace – even though it still gets pretty fast and frantic in certain sections, y'know?"

**Where did the game's art style and architecture come from?**

"A lot of it was based on my own feelings of going to London. Plus, Terry our art director directed the hell out of it. I was on a trip to London a couple of years ago and stood at the top of St Paul's Cathedral and looked out – so there's that, plus a little of Washington DC, Prague... If you're going to do something sci-fi, you should at least make it something interesting to look at. Why does everything have to be this bunker/factory shit, y'know? Let's give people beautiful stone sculptures, carvings, marble and whatnot – then blow it all to hell, put in some cool enemies and badass dudes and have some fun!"

**How about your enemies? What are you going for with them?**

"We wanted the Locust to be intelligent savages; they're like the Uruk-hai in *LOTR*, only with guns. The Uruk-hai would organise themselves, line up and then storm in – even though they look like horrible monsters. That's what the Locust essentially are: bipedal, thick-skinned, but also smart enough to build and use their own weaponry. They use tactics – they're not just running at you mindlessly."

**It's quite a bloody game. How far do you feel you can go with the gore?**

"Generally, with the violence in a game like *Gears* or *UT*, it's kind of cartoony. It's cutting people in half with a chainsaw at the end of a fucking gun! It's more slapstick *Evil Dead* than a snuff film or anything like that."

**How about the new single-player stuff you're developing for the PC?**

"We've got five new single-player chapters. If you played *Gears* on 360, there's a section where the guys just outrun this huge creature called the Brumak. This shows what happens between point A and point B – the APC the guys are in has to cross a bridge (which is like Tower Bridge, by the way) and they have to lower it with the Brumak stalking them. They have to figure out a way to turn on the power while this four-storey-tall creature with teeth and guns is coming at them, and eventually it'll result in a confrontation."

# tat ZonE

## And now, live from sunny Norwich... Yes, it's our eBay Sale of the Century!

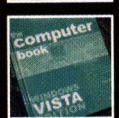
If this were an East Anglian quiz show from the early '80s, we'd likely have two ageing, permed models languishing over our gaming tat and pointing at it in staged amazement. As it is, we simply stick it up on eBay under the tag of PCZoners as soon as a new mag hits the shelves. Such is progress. The current total of all Tat Zone sales, as of last month? £1,412.35! Which could have bought a staggering 1,187 Double Cheeseburgers at McDonald's. But thankfully we gave it to charity instead.

**Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk All proceeds go to charity. Honest. www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org**

### THIS MONTH'S TAT



**STRANGE BOX**
Contains feathers. Not really sure why we have it. Intriguing, no?




**THE COMPUTER BOOK**
People used to print things like this before the internet.



**NEWSPAPER REPRINT**
From when 'the Japs' attacked Pearl Harbor.



**E3 CAP**
Found underneath Will's desk. Somewhat musty, but still serviceable.

### THE TAT BOARD

| COMPARE | ITEM TITLE | SOLD FOR | BIDS |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | **FALLOUT 3 POSTCARDS** Four postcards of a derelict wasteland – and no, we don't mean Blackpool. Guffaw! Chortle! Etc. | £9.90 | 11 |
|  | **FALLOUT 3 T-SHIRT** As soon as we get a Vault 101 boiler suit, we'll stick that up too. And a few aerosols of Jet to boot. | £40.00 | 17 |
|  | **TABULA RASA CAP** And what a lovely cap it was. 'Twas handed to us in the presence of General British as well, y'know... | £9.90 | 11 |
|  | **GAMECOCK T-SHIRT** OK, so we might have forgotten to put this one up on eBay. We'll stick it in the front door of a charity shop instead. They take any old shit. | £0.00 | N/A |



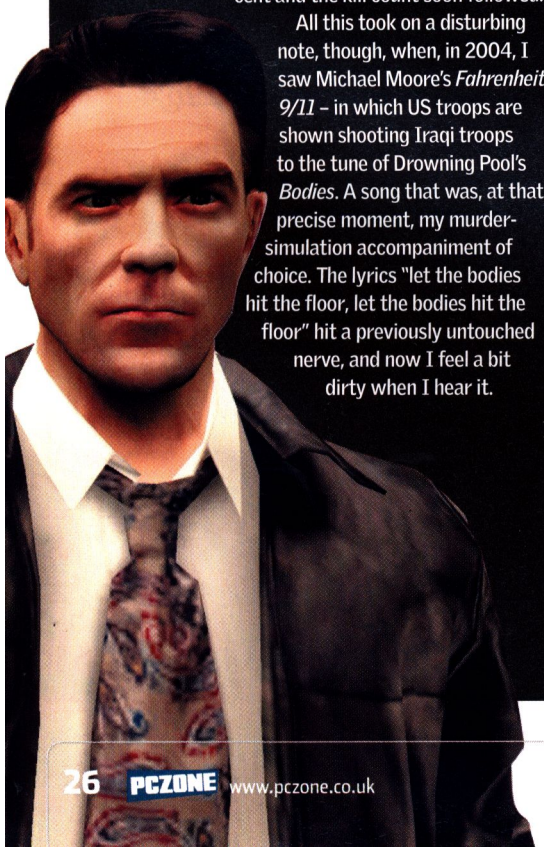
# WILL PORTER PRESENTS

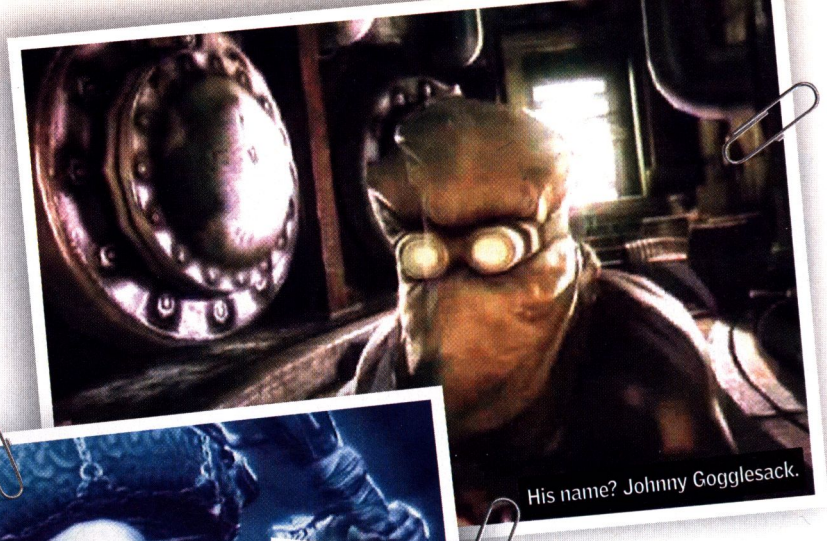
## THIS MONTH: MUSIC TO WATCH THE NPCS GO BY...

One of my favourite gaming moments was the discovery that I could run iTunes behind *Max Payne 2* at a volume which complemented the game's sound effects perfectly. Thus it was that I could hide behind a column listening to the build-up of Rage Against The Machine's *Guerrilla Radio*, before, at the song's zenith, leaping out into the fray with headshots timed to match the frenzied guitar. This buried me even deeper in love with the game, to the extent that I moved on to using 'ironic' music as my backing. Clearing out warehouses of gangsters to songs such as *Mr Sandman*, *On The Good Ship Lollipop* and *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* became a daily compulsion.

This wasn't anything new, though. While other (more socially advanced) people were busying themselves with mix tapes with which to intrigue the fairer sex at school, me and a mate used to lend each other tapes we called 'music to frag by'. This invariably consisted of various examples of crazy mid-'90s metal which could beat your mind into a bloody pulp and focus your every thought into filling your opponents full of rockets. It honestly worked as well: bloodlust went up 200 per cent and the kill count soon followed.

All this took on a disturbing note, though, when, in 2004, I saw Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* – in which US troops are shown shooting Iraqi troops to the tune of Drowning Pool's *Bodies*. A song that was, at that precise moment, my murder-simulation accompaniment of choice. The lyrics "let the bodies hit the floor, let the bodies hit the floor" hit a previously untouched nerve, and now I feel a bit dirty when I hear it.





His name? Johnny Gogglesack.



"Raarrrgh! Pleased to meet ye!"



Paging Mel Gibson...



"Must... maintain... disgusted... bewilderment..."

# CARS 'N' CARMACK

## id Software rev up their new shooter/racer *Rage*

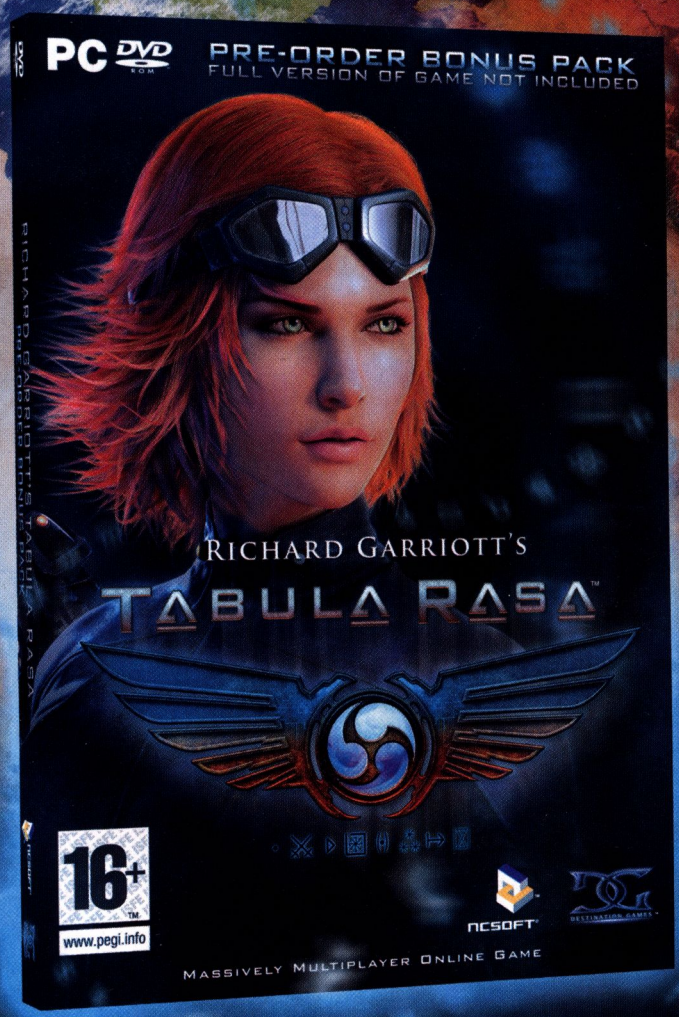
www.idsoftware.com | ETA: When it's done

**WE'VE BEEN PONDERING** this question for quite some time here at *PC ZONE*: with developers Raven working on *Quake 4* and the new Wolfy game, and Splash Damage creating *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, what the hell have id Software been up to? Well, QuakeCon 2007 in Texas finally revealed John Carmack and his fellow *Doom*-meisters' latest project – a first-person shooter/racer called *Rage*, driven by a mighty powerful multi-format graphics engine known as id Tech 5.

*Rage* puts you in the post-apocalyptic boots of a grizzled adventurer who has to fight mutants and assorted scumbags while scavenging for loot to sell and use to upgrade his vehicle, allowing him to then take part in violent, no-holds-barred racing contests. With an open structure, multiple side missions and the opportunity to bolt modifications onto your weapons too, *Rage* is an ambitious project that, according to id, is still very early in development.

Questions remain, such as how the PC's mouse/keyboard combo will work with the racing elements and whether the id Tech 5 engine can rival Epic's all-conquering Unreal Engine 3, but there's no doubt that the title represents a brave departure for the gib-happy games company that prides itself on its claustrophobic corridors. We'll have more on *Rage* very soon...

# TIME IS RUNNING OUT




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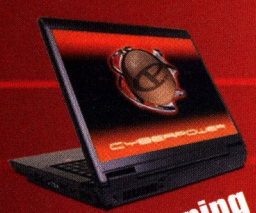
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# PCZONE CHARTS

ChartTrack

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | ↓ | WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BURNING CRUSADE | Issue 179 93% |
| 4 | ↓ | COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS | Issue 180 85% |
| 9 | ↓ | MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR | Issue 175 91% |
| 11 | RE | CIVILIZATION IV | Issue 162 92% |
| 12 | ↓ | GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2 | Issue 184 80% |
| 13 | ↓ | STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL | Issue 179 85% |
| 14 | ↑ | BATTLEFIELD 2142 | Issue 174 86% |
| 15 | RE | THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION | Issue 167 95% |
| 16 | ↓ | HARRY POTTER & THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX | Issue 184 79% |
| 17 | RE | SUPREME COMMANDER | Issue 179 88% |
| 18 | RE | COMPANY OF HEROES | Issue 173 93% |
| 19 | ↓ | TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY | Issue 182 83% |
| 20 | NEW | DAWN OF WAR ANTHOLOGY | Issue N/A N/A |




**WOW: BURNING CRUSADE**

This month, two literally became one, and therefore the loneliest number since time began, back in the year two.



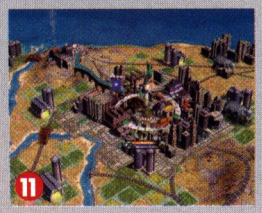

**COMMAND & CONQUER 3**

The sharp-eyed among you will notice the charts are considerably shorter this month, because we've omitted a certain franchise.




**MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**

After four comes nine – that's how it's always been. What are you babbling on about? What's a five?




**CIVILIZATION IV**

We don't even know what a '*The Sims*' is. All we know is that the charts look pretty hot this month.




**SUPREME COMMANDER**

Commander? Like, commanding little people around a house? That's an absurd gaming concept.




**COMPANY OF HEROES**

Will Wright? He's just a homeless man walking the streets. He was never successful. What?



It began in Africa. Ka. Ka. Ka...



Just wait till you see this in motion...

# KENYA BELIEVE IT?

## *Far Cry 2*'s Africa-based action entices muchly

farcry.us.ubi.com | ETA: Q2 2008

**OUR UNDISPUTED FAVOURITE** game of this year's Leipzig Games Convention was none other than *Far Cry 2* – possibly the most tantalising title on the vast horizon of the African savannah. Merging the freeform ethos of *STALKER* with the seat-of-the-pants nature of *Far Cry*, Ubisoft's upcoming shooter looks set to be a scorcher.

Just watching someone playing the game deciding to steal a Jeep from bandits, the bandits giving chase and a breathtaking sequence of events kicking off as a result was an utter joy. Tumbleweed bounced off the bonnet of the Jeep, gazelles leapt from the oncoming frenzy and a final crash through a collection of destructible, ramshackle huts led to our demo man being mercilessly gunned down. I shit you not – *Crysis* may well be looking like the bee's knees, but Ubisoft's *Far Cry 2* seems closer in spirit to the titles' joint island-bound progenitor.

It's gritty too – you remove bullets with a jab of your bowie knife instead of using health packs, weapons are meaty (and sometimes jam) and the violence is brutal. And the setting... Watching storms brewing, grass buffeted by wind and tree branches being lifted into the sky and rolled over the African plain is just amazing. It's unscripted – but at moments of great emotional trauma, such as when one of your surprisingly complex friendly NPCs unexpectedly meets their end, the wind will begin to howl, rain will start to fall and lightning will strike the savannah in the distance. More than any other game, *Far Cry 2* is an action film that builds itself around your machinations. Easily the single-player shooter of next year.

# BACK IN TOWN

## *Mafia II* potentially funny like a clown, amuses us

www.2kgames.com/mafia2 | ETA: TBA

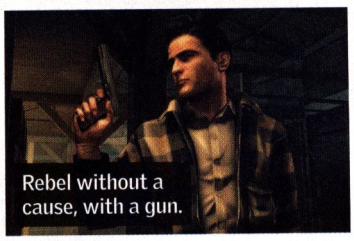
**2K GAMES RECENTLY** announced that they'd be publishing *Mafia II*, the sequel to one of our favourite games. In the first *Mafia*, you were Tommy Angelo, a taxi driver roped into the seedy world of seeds and mobsters. It was one of the few titles to nail the cinematic flair of movies such as *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather*, with its particular narrative device, mature storyline and gritty violence. Also, a bit where you're embroiled in a shootout at a funeral. Top stuff.

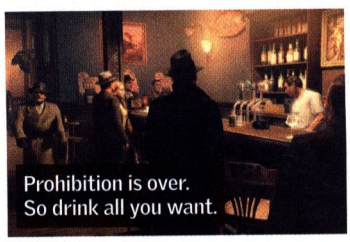
*Mafia II* takes place in, as far as we can tell, the early '50s. We've looked at these screenshots with one of those massive eye things jewellers use to look at diamonds, and we've determined that you're not Tommy Angelo any more. Also, using science, we've guessed that you're not Tommy's son either (unless the main character is about 20 – and you don't get to do cool mafia stuff at that age). Rather, you're a young Marlon Brando lookalike, in what would appear to be New York City-style surroundings (the bus has "Empire City Transport" on the back). We're 85 per cent certain there'll be a shootout with a rival gang in Grand Central Station, and a car chase across Central Park. The cars themselves should be slightly more exciting than the crawling horseless carriages of the original, with faster mid-century machines allowing for some sprightly top speeds, and probably some decent chases too.

A trailer shown at Leipzig happily included a direct reference to *Goodfellas* too, with the game's characters standing around a 'trunk' over a dead body, conversing casually because they know how cool that looks. Hopefully, the wonderfully tight scriptwriting of the original will be repeated, and there'll be another engrossing and fitting soundtrack – any game set in the '50s demands a decent slice of music from that era. However this turns out, colour us sepia tones of excited.

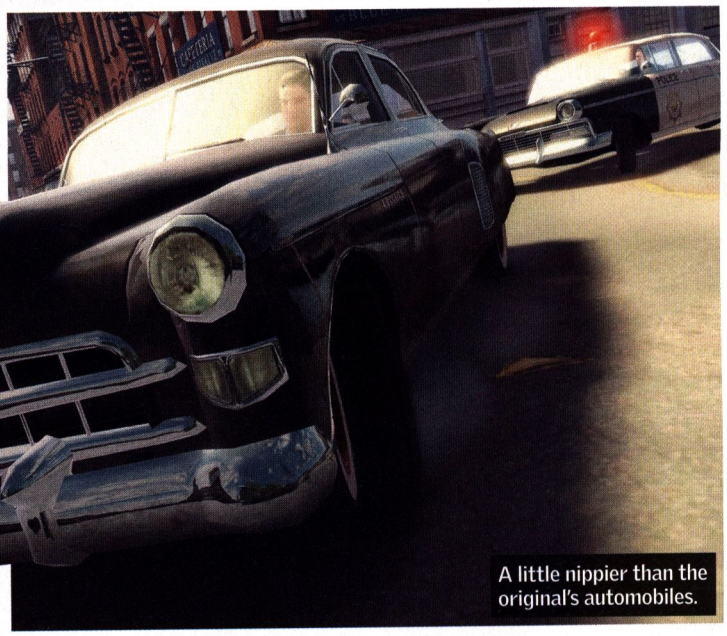


"As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster."


Rebel without a cause, with a gun.


Prohibition is over. So drink all you want.


That is some slick hair...


A little nippier than the original's automobiles.



ETA
2008

## PASSPORT CONTROL

# BORDERLANDS

***Martin Korda*** **saddles up to discover a new frontier in FPS gaming. A final frontier, if you will...**

**DEVELOPER** Gearbox **PUBLISHER** 2K Games **WEBSITE** www.gearboxsoftware.com



Bandits will be numerous but disorganised.

### THE LOWDOWN

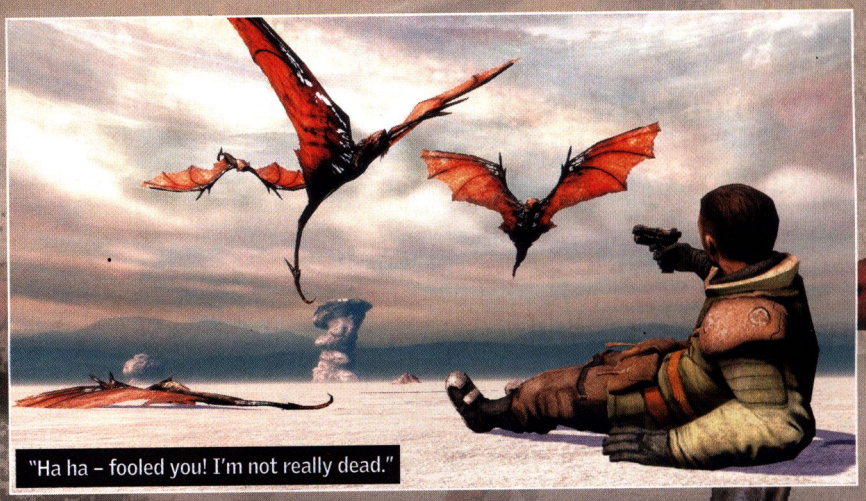
| | |
|---|---|
| Over half a million unique weapons | ✓ |
| Customisable vehicles | ✓ |
| RPG elements infused into FPS template | ✓ |
| Deep, character-driven plot | ✓ |
| No destructible terrain | ✗ |

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!** For too long, too many shooters have relied on the same old template, the same old action, the same old weapons. What we need is a game that'll rock the genre to its core, bring about change, attempt something new and do it with panache. *STALKER* gave it a worthy crack, but I'd say it was a few steps off fully realising its groundbreaking potential.

Hang on a minute! What's this? An invitation from Gearbox Software – creators of *Half-Life: Opposing Force* and the *Brothers In Arms* franchise – to fly to Texas to see their new FPS, *Borderlands*? An FPS with RPG elements and an open-ended yet still plot-driven campaign? A game that'll enable you to easily hook up with three mates and zip around a world that mixes the best of Hollywood science fiction with the ethos of life on a dangerous new frontier? Sounds like this could be just



You can thank Hollywood legend Ron Cobb for designs such as these.



"Ha ha – fooled you! I'm not really dead."

**Just like a full-blown RPG, it'll give you the choice of linearly following its main campaign or completing side quests**

the thing we've been looking for. Now isn't that a stroke of luck?

## 21 HOURS LATER

So here I am in Gearbox's Texan offices. I won't bore you with the minutiae of my near day-long ordeal to get here, save to say that having my balls cupped by a sweaty security guard searching for Semtex sacks was the low point.

Sitting with me in the demo room are musician, magician, architect and – not forgetting – Gearbox president Randy Pitchford, director Matthew Armstrong, senior vice-president of business development Marc Tardif and producer Simon Hurley. With a line-up this impressive, I'm expecting something pretty special...

"There are so many things that we think first-person shooters can do to evolve the genre," begins Randy in a positively upbeat tone. "Which is why we decided to make *Borderlands*. It's a science fiction first-person shooter that you'll be able to play in four-player co-op mode either locally or over the internet. And of course, you'll also be able to play it by yourself."

Set on the Unreal Engine 3-powered planet of Pandora, *Borderlands* centres on the search for a fabled alien artefact. Huge forces settled on Pandora when rumours spread that alien technology lay undiscovered somewhere on the planet's inhospitable surface. "It became like an Old West frontier town," explains Matt, outlining a sci-fi universe not a million miles away from that seen in Joss Whedon's short-lived *Firefly* TV series. "There's lawlessness and recklessness; it's like the American gold-rush era. It wasn't long before the colonists' frontiers pushed into the borderlands. However, after exploring the planet, the settlers found that it was hostile and it didn't have the riches they'd expected. Those with money left behind the ones who didn't, leaving several settlements trying to survive." Thinking about it, it's also a bit like the largely forgotten '80s cartoon *Bravestarr* – albeit without the sub-*He-Man* posturing.



A drive-by, space-style.

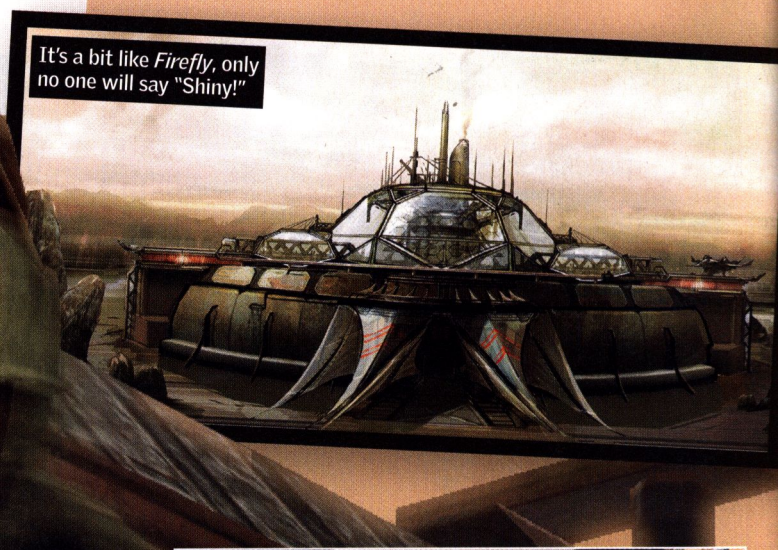


Skags: nasty, or just misunderstood?

Things go from bad to worse on Pandora. As the season slowly changes from winter to spring, hostile, previously unseen indigenous life awakens from hibernation, and the settlers suddenly find themselves beset by rapacious predators as they continue their search for the alien technology. It's right around this point that you show up.

## ENTER YOU

Playing as a mercenary treasure-hunter and accompanied by a ragtag crew (for more on your sidekicks, see the 'Meet your mates' panel), your first goal will be to gain the trust of the local yokels by helping them with their problems. For example, you'll be required to deal with stray packs of Scythid Sprinters – giraffe-sized, lightning-quick killers that can cut a man into


It's a bit like *Firefly*, only no one will say "Shiny!"

**"If you take every gun ever made in every game, *Borderlands* has more by over two orders of magnitude"**
Randy Pitchford, president, Gearbox Software


If there's a scratch on the car, there's a scratch on your face.


The axe man cometh.


The Rakk Hive is a sight to behold. And its mouth looks a bit rude.

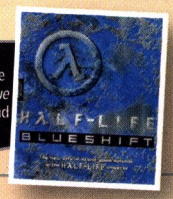

*Borderlands* will feature around 600,000 unique weapons.

## THE STORY SO FAR... GEARBOX SOFTWARE

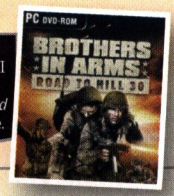
**1999 – THE BEGINNING**
Pitchford and co set up shop, and release the ace *Half-Life: Opposing Force* expansion.



**2001 – TRUE BLUE**
While not as awesome as *Opposing Force*, *Blue Shift* enjoys critical and commercial success.




**2005 – BAND OF BROTHERS**
Gearbox release WWII team-based shooter *Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30*. We approve.




**2007 – GAME OVER, MAN**
Gearbox say they've started work on a new *Aliens*-themed FPS, due for release in 2009.

16 fillets in under ten seconds – or find them various bits of loot in the barren, sprawling world.

It's here that we come to the game's first truly innovative feature. Just like a full-blown RPG, *Borderlands* will give you the choice of linearly following its main plot-driven campaign or taking a detour to complete side quests. "You can do these side quests at any time," beams Randy. "If you want to go off the main story and complete sub-quests or find better stuff, then you'll be able to do that whenever you want."

Complete these tasks and you'll be rewarded with money, love, trust, respect and, most importantly, experience points, which you can then use to level up your character. Skills will include the abilities to jump higher and further, run faster, absorb more damage and use better weapons and equipment. "When you play in co-op mode, all experience will be shared equally, because different people will have different roles," explains Matt, eager to flag up the game's innovative approach to multiplayer.

RPG elements such as *Borderlands*' levelling-up facility are enabling Gearbox to take the FPS genre in some exciting new directions, one striking innovation being the eradication of difficulty levels, thanks to the game's scalable challenge system. Gearbox are attempting to eliminate reload-key-slapping when you're faced with a particularly testing battle, by allowing you to backtrack, complete a few side quests, bolster your abilities and equipment, and then return for another crack.

## GUN-HO

While we're hovering in the vicinity of weapons, you'd best prepare for a shock. A pleasant one, but a shock nonetheless. You know how most shooters feature 10, 12, 15, perhaps even 20 weapons? Well, *Borderlands* is set to have a few more. Do you want to have a guess how many? "30?" Nope. "40?" Sorry, guess again. "Surely not... 50?" Not even close. "100?" Nyet, non and nein. OK, you've suffered long enough. *Borderlands* will feature... 600,000 unique weapons. Count the zeros, my friends, then breathe in... breathe out... and relax, while Randy fills you in on the details.

"If you take every gun ever made in every game and add them all together, *Borderlands* would have more by over two orders of magnitude," he says, as he begins to spawn countless handguns, machine guns and sniper rifles onto the screen. Each one flies out and skids along the floor, stopping to reveal itself as unique to everything that's come before.

"We want you to always be able to find better stuff, to always be searching for a better weapon." Randy also reveals that the ballistic arsenal littering the floor is merely the tip of *Borderlands*' weapons iceberg, with plasma guns, rocket launchers and alien technology to be revealed at a later date.

"Every single weapon is procedurally generated," says Simon, picking up the reins from his colleague. "Weapons are cobbled together from different pieces of technology, so you can have a melee weapon that's a cross between a meat cleaver and a chainsaw. We use lots of different components for weapons that can be amalgamated in different ways, and each component brings with it its own set of pros and cons. No two weapons are ever the same."

## YEAH, BUT NO, BUT

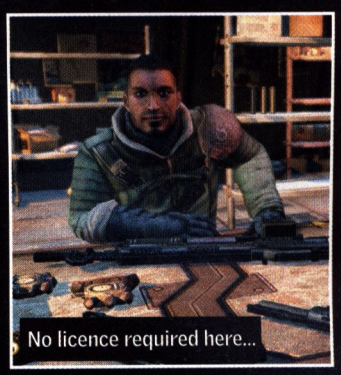
"Yeah, but," I interject, like a petulant teenager caught smoking his father's cigarettes in the back garden, "how can we tell which weapon does what without the need for countless stats?" Of course, Gearbox have already thought of that. "The colour of the gun will give you an indication of its abilities," replies Simon without hesitation. He picks up a black gun and demonstrates its high rate of fire on a nearby target dummy. It's quick, but leaves much to be desired in terms of accuracy. Then he picks up a silver machine gun and pummels the dummy again – at a slower rate, but dishing out far more damage. "The silver weapons will have a greater chance of achieving an Extreme Critical Hit, while black weapons will fire

## Trading up

**Guns, lovely guns. Get 'em while they're hot...**

Each of *Borderlands*' seven settlements will feature a friendly local gun shop, which, if the one that we saw is anything to go by, will be run by a wisecracking guy who's always in need of a hired gun to sort out a bit of business for him.

As well as acquiring new quests, you'll also be able to purchase weapons, bullets and armour at these establishments, or, if you're running a little low on funds, flog some items for a bit of extra cash. Once you've gained the owner's trust, they may even be willing to provide you with some information regarding the whereabouts of the alien artefact, so always remember: ask questions first, squeeze the trigger later.


No licence required here...


Harvey Dent's little sister?

## Vroom, vroom

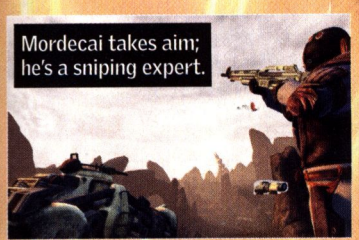
**Start your engines, warm up your guns**

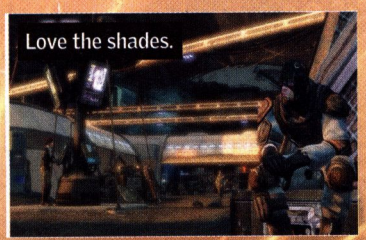

Board or be boarded during vehicular combat.

We've been promised that *Borderlands* will be packed full of intense vehicular combat. Apparently, you'll be able to collect a garage of cars and customise their paintwork and weapons. You'll also be able to use them for *Mad Max*-style vehicular jousts.

Similar in look and feel to *UT3*'s vehicles, *Borderlands*' motorised death machines are more durable, allowing for brutal and protracted high-speed chases. You'll be able to either drive a car or man its turret while an AI sidekick fills the other role. Better still, you'll also be able to jump onto enemy vehicles, and have foes try to board yours.

Gearbox only showed us one vehicle, the Salt Racer – which can tackle both rough terrain and high-speed getaways via different front-wheel positions – but they promised more details will be revealed soon.


Mordecai takes aim; he's a sniping expert.


Love the shades.


"Please leave the *Big Brother* house now..."



**The place feels as though it's been sucked out of a *Mad Max* movie**

Vehicles are blown to pieces. Literally.

quickly, but lack accuracy," he explains, with a look of satisfaction.

"Thanks to this colouring system, it'll take you very little time to work out what each gun is going to be like, despite there being around 600,000 of them," chimes in Matt. "If you want the shotgun from *Doom*, you can find it. If you want the shotgun from *Half-Life*, you can find it. Whatever gun you want, you'll be able to find it. Each style of gun will use its own ammunition. The game will be more like *Serious Sam* than *Doom 3* when it comes to ammo. You don't want to have a great gun and no ammo for it, so you'll always be able to purchase more bullets."

## BADLANDS

Of course, there's no point in filling your game full of innovative features and hundreds of thousands of weapons if the shoot-outs are going to be limper than a spineless corpse. Eager to see the game in full flow, I ask Randy to show me what *Borderlands* has to offer in the action department.

Firing up a mountainous level, he sets about tracking down a group of bandits rumoured to have vital information about the alien artefact's whereabouts. He's standing in a settlement called Newhaven, one of seven human towns on Pandora that you'll get to visit. Panning around the level, he reveals metal buildings cobbled together from pieces of scrap. On the far side, a giant piece of mining equipment juts out like a giant's chainsaw. The place looks and feels like something out of a post-apocalyptic world, as though it's been sucked out of a *Mad Max* movie and injected into the game.

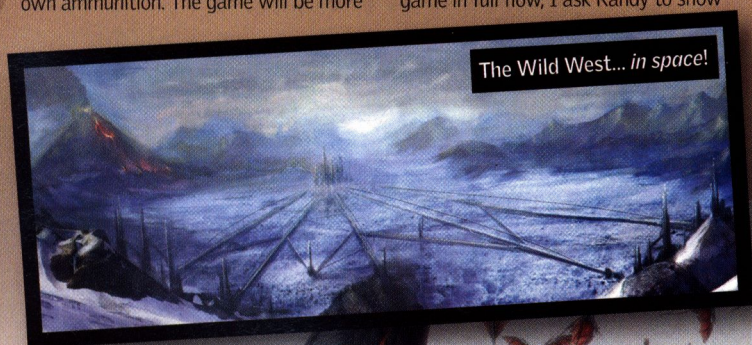
Before he embarks on his mission, Randy quickly informs me that much of the game's technology is being designed by Hollywood legend Ron Cobb, who has designed alien and futuristic technology for the likes of *Total Recall* and *Back To The Future*. I'm impressed.

## BING, BANG, BOOM

I watch as Randy stalks through the desolate wasteland, capping stray patrols from a distance with a sleek, streamlined sniper rifle. Soon, though, he's forced to switch to a machine gun, as a pair of Skags – vicious four-legged creatures with razor teeth – bound towards him, their eyes gleaming with murderous intent. He waits till they're close, their mouths gaping, before sending a hail of lead down each one's oesophagus. "Skags have really strong armour, so the best way to kill them quickly is to shoot them in the mouth," proclaims the victorious Gearbox boss. "You'll come across loads of alien species on the planet and find that the wildlife has a natural pecking order."

It's not long before he's reached the camp, a maze of streets and buildings carved into rocks. After a brief, bravado-laden exchange between his character and the bandit leader, the killing ensues. Randy hurls a Rain Grenade into a pack of enemies, who scatter like birds fleeing a predator. But to no avail. The grenade spits out a series of explosions and incinerates all nearby foes, who dance death jigs as they burn.

Thanks to a combination of *Brothers In Arms*'s team AI system and an all-new individual enemy AI that sees your foes displaying spatial awareness and using tactics (to varying degrees, depending on their proficiency), the battles are already looking highly promising, though any

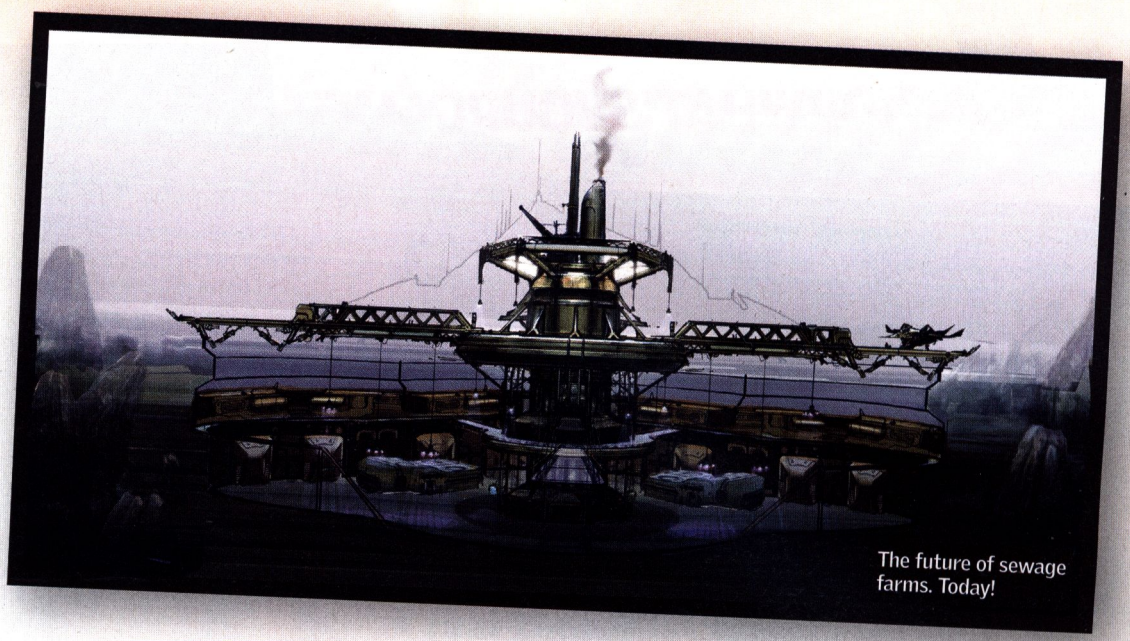


The Wild West... *in space!*



Shooting a giant, red-eyed space rhino is generally a bad idea.





The future of sewage farms. Today!

## Meet your mates

**Loners with a murky past, enter stage left**



**LILITH**
Clearly in need of some sun and vitamin D, this psychic siren was once an ordinary human like you and me, but got a little too close to some alien technology and ended up looking like this. Tough break, eh?



**MORDECAI**
Clearly a big fan of WWI pilot memorabilia, Mordecai is a hunter with an animal friend who helps him – though presumably not with killing other animals. He's also a dab hand with a sniper rifle.



**ROLAND**
While his name is hardly butch, this ex-mercenary soldier is, as the wrinkly scowl suggests, all man. Well, apart from the cybernetic implants in his head enabling him to have information directly transferred to his brain.



**HELENA PIERCE**
The mayor of Newhaven plays a pivotal role in your quest to find the artefact. She'll send you on countless missions, then charge you for driving in the city centre, kiss your baby and ask you to vote for her.



There's a touch of Riddick here, too.



What brings you here?

firm predictions about their final quality are impossible at such an early stage of development. One small disappointment is the omission of destructible terrain, but given the slickness of the combat, it seems like a fairly small price to pay.

## WAIT FOR IT

Randy has saved the best till last. Loading a new level, he sets about completing an objective for Helena Pierce, Newhaven's untrustworthy mayor. She's sent him out to deal with a flock of Rakk – similar to vultures, only bigger, scarier and even more ruthless – that have been terrorising the settlement.

Randy easily deals with the first few, but rounding a corner, he comes face to toe with one of the most awesome creatures I've ever seen in a video game – a Rakk Hive. Twenty metres tall, this monstrous beast looks like a giant rhino on steroids, its back pockmarked with holes, from which an army of Rakk emerge into the open and swoop down at Randy in a blanket of certain death. With that, the demo concludes...

Judging by these early impressions, *Borderlands* looks like it's going to have one hell of a crack at taking the FPS genre to the next level of its evolution. Gearbox certainly has the experience and pedigree to pull it off, and from what I've seen and heard so far, I'm certainly hopeful that it can and will succeed. With its bold and innovative multiplayer co-op mode, unrivalled arsenal, vehicular combat and open-ended format, this game is clearly showing a heck of a lot of promise. Rest assured that we'll be monitoring this one closely, because if it fulfils its ample potential, the long wait for a truly groundbreaking shooter could be about to come to an end. PCZ

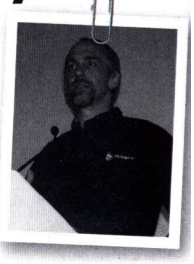


OI!

# BRITISH! WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

***Martin Korda*** **meets Richard 'Lord British' Garriott to discuss his vision for the future of MMO gaming,** ***Tabula Rasa***

## Who are ya?



**NAME** Richard Garriott
**DEVELOPER** NCsoft
**POSITION** Creative director
**AGE** 46
**GAMES WORKED ON BEFORE** Every *Ultima* game ever
**FAVOURITE GAMES** *Myst*, *American McGee's Alice* and *Medal Of Honor*
**FIRST GAME WORKED ON** *Akalabeth: World Of Doom*


"We *all* got struck by lightning? Jeez, what are the chances?"

**Q So, first things first – where did the moniker Lord British come from?**

**A** "I was actually born in England. When I was first playing D&D I needed to find a nickname, and earlier that year I'd moved to Texas, and all the locals thought I had a British accent. The nickname stuck, and when I started writing games I'd always include my character Lord British. My very first publishers said that Richard Garriott wasn't a very memorable name, and dumped me from the credits and left only Lord British as the author of the early *Ultima* games. Most people don't know this, but Lord British's first name is Canterbridgian."

**How are you changing Lord British into General British?**

"When you're asked to make an ethical judgement in a game, I believe it's important that it's you in the game. In this way, General British is me within *Tabula Rasa*. So in 2012, when the world is invaded by the Bane, you and I are going to survive to fight back. But since we'll be part of a military organisation, my character will no longer be Lord British, but General British."

***Tabula Rasa* seems to be doing some interesting stuff, melding player combat interaction with more traditional MMO mechanics...**

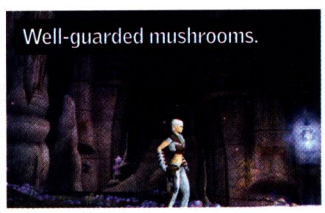
"Yes. I think that MMO combat has devolved. Once you've highlighted an opponent, you ignore the rest of the world. All that matters are your short-cut and health bars. *Tabula Rasa*'s combat is different; it's real-time, fast-paced and tactical. In addition to your character's attributes being relevant – the game will automatically target enemies – you can also use the 3D environment to your advantage. So if you're standing behind a wall, you're less likely to be hit."

**Can you give us any background information on the alien races, the Eloh and the Bane?**

"The Eloh are basically the first sentient intergalactic race. They've travelled from world to world, but never found another race on their level. So they've left behind symbols and information on these worlds about who they are and where they can be found. When they've found sentient life, they've freely given them their technology so that they can join their quest to explore the universe. But one day they encountered the Bane – the group of aliens that you'll be fighting against in *Tabula Rasa* – a xenophobic race that used the technology to wage war."

**Can you tell us about the Eloh's language and how you created it?**

"The Eloh have left behind obelisks on many planets covered in a pictographic language, telling other races where to find them. This language is one of my personal design contributions to the game. It took months of research and development to perfect. For example, a bounded hourglass symbol means 'now'. If there's a dot before or after it, it means in the past or the future. Two people with a tick means two people in the first person, i.e. 'we', an arrow means 'travel' and stars mean 'stars'. 'Now we travel the stars.' There'll be bonuses in the game to people who take the time to decipher the messages."


Well-guarded mushrooms.

**How will *Tabula Rasa* compete against the likes of *WOW*?**

"I think that *Tabula Rasa* represents a major step towards the feature sets of tomorrow, whereas I see *World Of Warcraft* as being the pinnacle of the design principles of the past. I not only believe that *Tabula Rasa* will be successful, but also that those who iterate on features for future MMO games will be iterating from *Tabula Rasa*'s feature set."

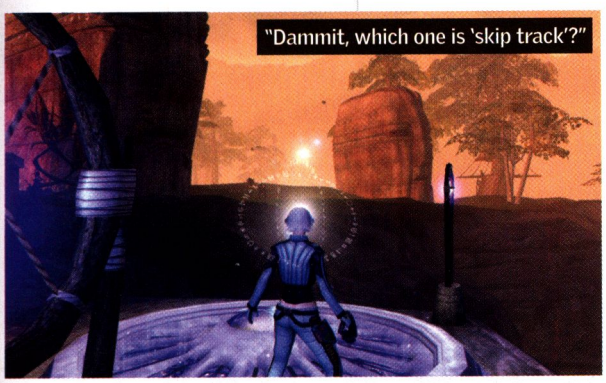
**What was the game like before the more science fiction-themed version we see today?**

"The fiction was more of a hybrid between fantasy and sci-fi. We tried to find a blend between Eastern and Western art styles, because there aren't many Korean games that have been successful in the West, or vice versa, but we ended up appealing to neither market. We found that by sticking to our own style, both markets were happier. That's when we abandoned the fantasy direction. But the goals, game design and the dynamic world were the same, while the story was the same in principle, only with a different context."

**Do you ever dream of returning to the *Ultima* series?**

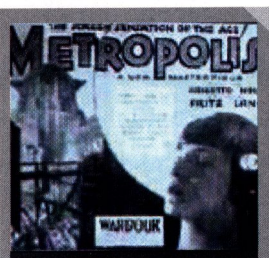
"From a practical standpoint, I don't think it's going to happen, because EA owns the property. If it were ever available to me, I'd love to go back and do some more *Ultimas*. However, I do have Lord British and my own design principles, so while I can't go back to Britannia, I can create a new Britannia. It's a hypothetical future that I'd consider." PCZ

**"*Tabula Rasa*'s combat is different: real-time, fast-paced and tactical"**

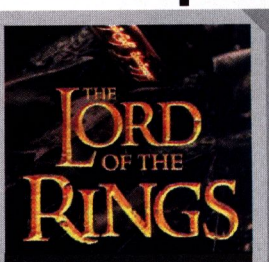

"Dammit, which one is 'skip track'?"




## RICHARD GARRIOTT
## Where he turns for inspiration...




**METROPOLIS**
The cinematography and themes of the 1927 silent movie are a big influence.




**THE LORD OF THE RINGS**
How could a fantasy game developer *not* be inspired by Tolkien's trilogy?



**DUNGEONS & DRAGONS**
Garriott used to be heavily into D&D before he began his career in videogames.



1



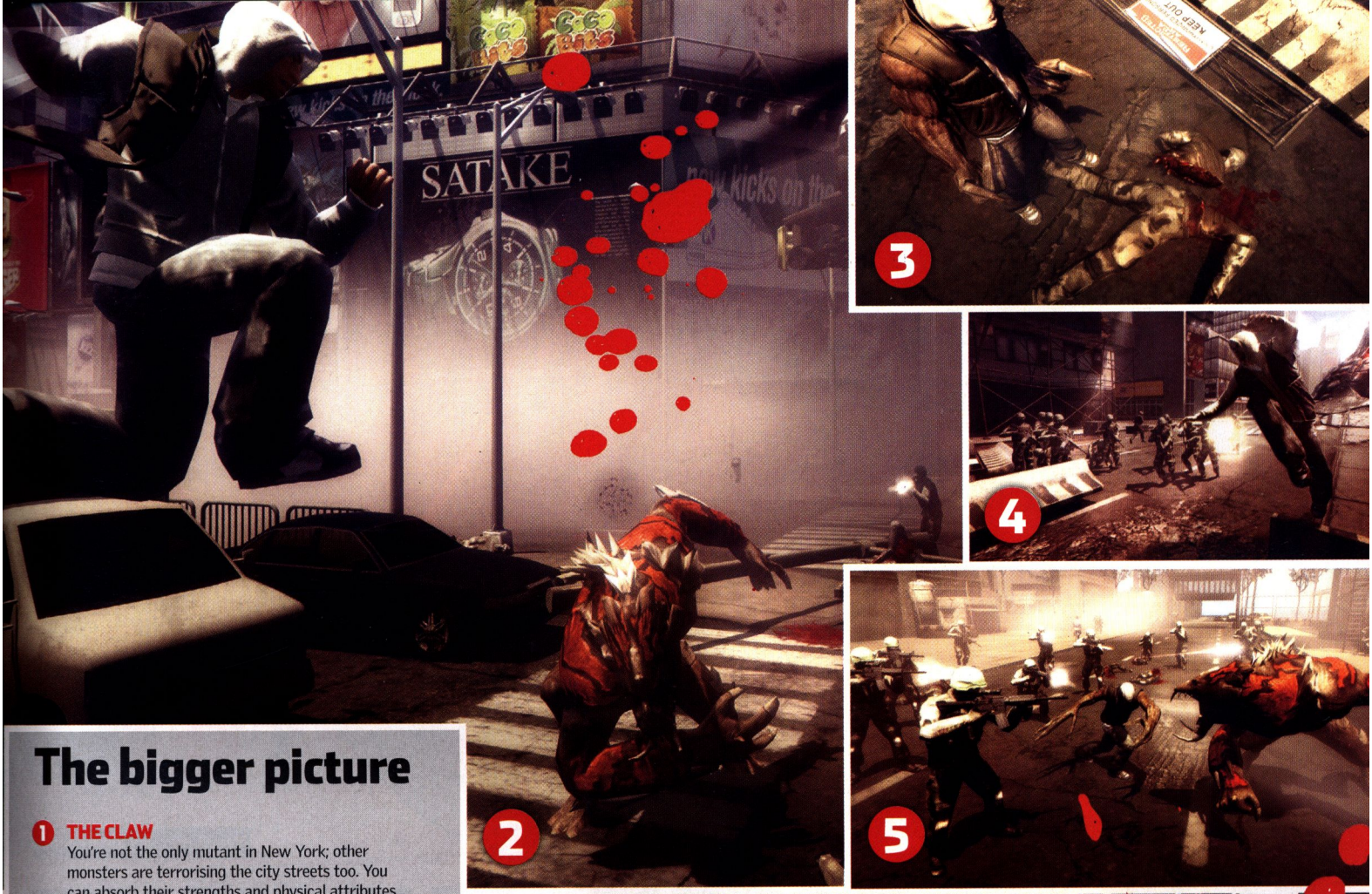
HOT SHOTS

# PROTOTYPE

**DEVELOPER** Radical Entertainment **PUBLISHER** Vivendi **WEB** www.radical.ca **ETA** 2008

**IT'S A GAME** that melds the fluffy pink delights of Nintendo's ability-stealing Kirby with the free-roaming city-sandbox action of *Crackdown*. Bounce around a city absorbing powers, rubbing your face against the pavement to gain rock-like armoured skin, or perhaps fondling lamp posts to make fluorescent light shoot out of your eyes with the power of pure tungsten. This is *Prototype*, from the men and women who made the last Hulk game, and, of course, *Scarface*. Actually, this is a bit like *The Hulk* and *Scarface* mixed together, too. But that's an altogether more depressing mixture than the Kirby one. Still, if you've ever wanted to grab a building by its corner and shake it until it snaps off at the second floor, this might be the game for you.

7












# The bigger picture

**1 THE CLAW**
You're not the only mutant in New York; other monsters are terrorising the city streets too. You can absorb their strengths and physical attributes. Such as these claws.

**2 EDIBLE PARABLES**
The story hasn't been revealed just yet, but it'll be told through the memories of people whose abilities you ingest. There'll be over 250 nuggets of narrative to find in this way.

**3 HALF AND HALF**
This man has been neatly sliced in two, probably thanks to one of the 750 combinations of destructive powers you can possess. You'll eventually be powerful enough to wreck buildings.

**4 SOLDIERS' KNEES AND TOES**
Not only can you steal abilities such as night vision (from a man wearing night-vision goggles); you can also steal identities. Become an army general to enter a military base, for example.

**5 LEAVE IT, MATE**
The old trick of not getting involved in fights makes an appearance too. The military are often too busy killing these big red things to bother going after you, so why make a fuss?

**6 I KNOW KUNG FU**
The game explains your ability to fly helicopters and whatnot by simply asking you to steal the abilities of a pilot first – which is great, as long as you're comfortable with ruining their career.

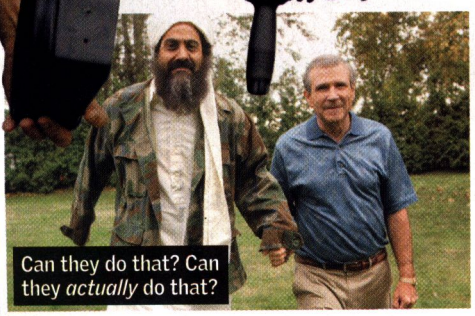
**7 HELL OF A TOWN**
Yes, it's a crowded New York street. We're hoping for *Assassin's Creed*-style crowd interaction, or at least the option to steal the ability to be a fat, noisy, arrogant human being.



Wow! Humans with boobs!

# POSTAL: THE MOVIE

## *Jon Blyth*'s advice to Uwe Boll's PR team: when showing his movies, provide drugs



Can they do that? Can they *actually* do that?



Ho boy – it's a penis.

**AMAZINGLY, *POSTAL* SUCCEEDED** in dragging two lols out of me. My first reluctant chuckle was when I watched a ten-year-old (at a guess) actress remain heroically deadpan while she gets shot, as a red prawn of gib effects flies out of her midriff. The second moment was when a bunch of half-nude female cult devotees – dressed as erotic Hitlers – leave the scene to distract some guards, and one of them comes back with a brown face. I guess the Venn diagram of German humour and my own must converge on murder and scat. Sigh.

The best way to describe the gaming Antichrist's foray into shock comedy is to imagine that Uwe Boll is trying his best to slap you. Only he's got these tiny little T rex arms, and he's just going tip-tap on your forehead. But you can tell he really wants to slap you, because he's this amazing boxer, and he should be able to really hurt you. So he gets upset, and snot comes out of his nose, and he stands on his tippy-toes and he screams. "Be offended! Laugh! Just stop being... underwhelmed!"

Bless. The best bit of casting is Uwe as himself, where he addresses his reputation and his gaming audience. He's there to peddle his soft-toy penis to the people of Postal Dude's town of (sledgehammer-irony klaxon) Paradise, but he still finds time for lines that might yet become classic – for example, "It's horny, with all these children around." The man just doesn't give a shit (his last words being "I hate videogames" – lol), and he's dangerously close to being likeable. It's a shame about the films, but you can't have it all.

It's impossible to muster genuine shock, hatred or disgust for Uwe Boll or his films without seeming rather demented. Let's just leave the fella alone; he's making the world more interesting. I just wish he was doing it with his films.

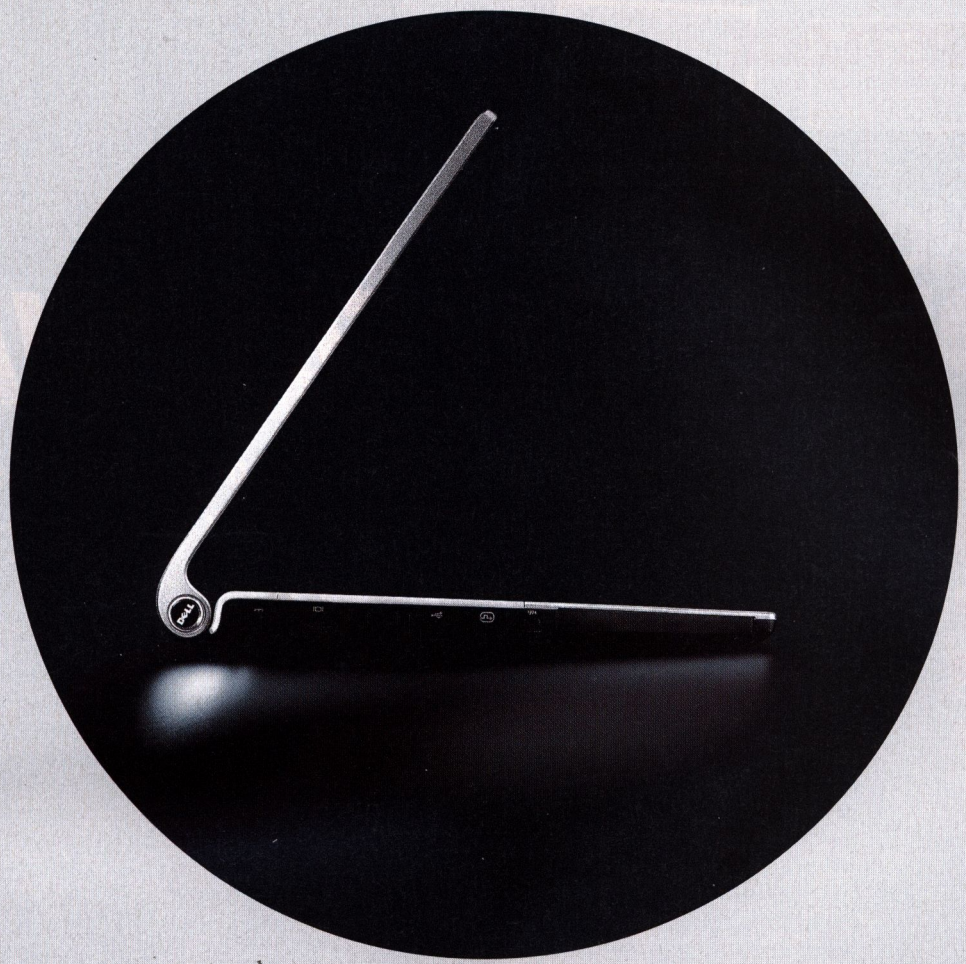
**RATING:** ★★☆☆☆

## Dire shock...

These are just some of the themes that are used for laughs in *Postal* – but which ones are like a grumpy, swearing teenager, and which are actually funny?

| UNFORGIVABLE | | DIRE | | | | PASSABLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sweary dwarf | Dave out of *Kids In The Hall* farting | Quadriplegic abuse | Exploding obese woman | Retarded fundamentalist playing air hockey | Transvestite monkey assaults | Cult-member coprophagia | Casual murder |

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# LAN OF HOPE AND GLORY...
# EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

**THE LOWDOWN**

- From the makers of *Rome: Total War* ✓
- New 1700-1800s 'empire-building' campaign ✓
- Naval warfare in a *Total War* game! ✓
- Has a revolutionised graphics engine ✓
- Could possibly take over the known world ✗

**ETA WHEN IT'S DONE**

***Jamie Sefton*** **fills his wellington boots with possibly the finest strategy game ever to sail the seven seas...**

**DEVELOPER** The Creative Assembly **PUBLISHER** Sega **WEBSITE** www.totalwar.com

**ALL HAIL THE POWER** of mystic Will Porter! Back in issue 177, *PC ZONE*'s less-than-ancient sage declared that if the logical next step for the *Total War* series was implementing naval combat, then "it would be a good opportunity to bring it into the Napoleonic era". Nine months on and here we are with the announcement of *Empire: Total War*, the brand new game from The Creative Assembly, and a true revolution for a series that, like a sailor knocked overboard at the start of a sea battle, has been treading water for too long.

*Empire: Total War* takes place during the period from the 1700s to the early 1800s, a turbulent era in history when technology was being fuelled by a new industrial age, and for the first time various powers were fighting for control of the Old and New Worlds on a global scale. This is the age of the French Revolution, Voltaire, the American War of Independence, Mozart, Wellington, the British Empire and, of course, Guybrush Threepwood, Captain Jack Sparrow and *Blackadder The Third*.

## SHIPSHAPE

As you can see from these decidedly gorgeous screenshots, *Empire*'s big-ticket attraction – its unique, ahem, *sailing* point – is the introduction of proper naval combat to the *Total War* series. As with the complex land battles, the sea warfare will involve real-time 3D action, but instead of troops, you'll command single ships or fleets of up to 20 craft, which vary in size, speed and manoeuvrability, ranging from small brigs to powerful ships of the line.

Vessels will be able to let fly with chain shot, grapeshot, musket fire and cannonballs, which you can aim at your foes' destructible sails, decks and/or hulls so they sink faster than Robert Maxwell. You can also opt to grapple and board enemy ships for exciting fights on-deck with muskets and sabres, any captured ships becoming part of your fleet, and thus available for use in subsequent battles. Also boasting real-time weather effects such as fog and ever-changing sea conditions, *Empire: Total War* promises to deliver some of the most realistic and visceral sea battles ever seen in a PC game – with everything except the smell of salt, gangrene and fish in your nostrils (see 'Naval gazing').

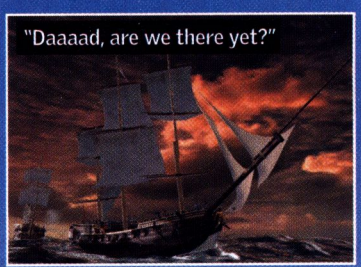
## LAND AHOY!

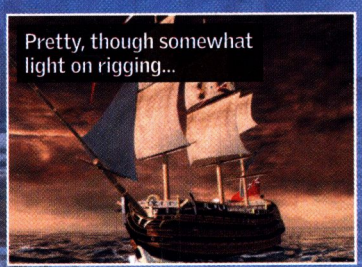
As well as taking part in the all-new offshore encounters, you will of course be commanding your armies over land, in a campaign that spans Europe, North America, the Caribbean and India, and features revamped trade, diplomacy, mission and espionage systems. New tactics have evolved on the battlefield, so you'll be able to destroy buildings and walls and use them as cover, deploy defences and employ a variety of new unit firing drills and formations – such as the classic hollow square that's effective against a single target but very vulnerable to cannon fire.

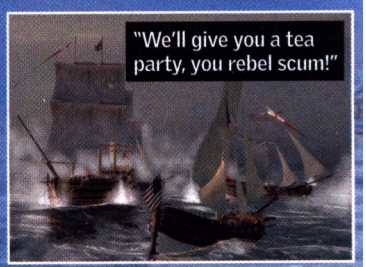
The campaign itself includes historical figures such as French dictator and pint-sized comedy staple Napoleon, and ten playable factions vying for economic and political supremacy, including Great Britain, America, France and Prussia. The Creative Assembly promise plenty of variety in the different factions and their units, with abilities and tech trees evolving throughout the period – so playing as a naval power such as Britain will be very different to playing as an emerging continental power such as Prussia, for example.

*Empire: Total War* will also feature a new fully animated, non-grid-based campaign map for planning your empire-building, allowing for tighter control of army movement as well as a closer relationship between the terrain you see at this strategic level and the terrain you start with on the battlefield. Also, buildings will now be visible on the map without you having to click on the settlements that they're in, so you'll be able to click on them and upgrade directly from the map. Apart from the added convenience, this means you'll now be able to see at a glance how



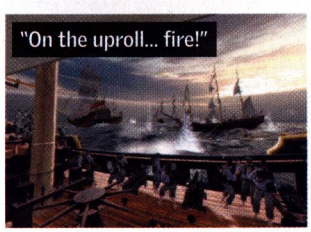




## Naval gazing

**Adding realistic sea battles to *Total War* is a major challenge for the developers...**




With The Creative Assembly finally bringing proper naval battles to the *Total War* series, lead designer James Russell told us about some of the issues that will have to be resolved to make them work. "Ships are constantly moving platforms, making them harder to manage than land units that move to attack at a specific position. Also, ships tend to fire in a different direction from their movement direction and have different damage elements – the sails may be destroyed, but the hull still intact, for example.

"We want to turn these difficulties into strengths. I'd say that many games have oversimplified naval warfare that removes a lot of potential gameplay, while others have made it too slow and fiddly, with too much micromanagement. It isn't easy to get it right, but we think we can do it, just as we have with land battles."

## THE STORY SO FAR... TOTAL WAR

**2000**

**Samurai warrior**
*Shogun: Total War*, The Creative Assembly's first RTS title, hits the shelves. Success!



**2002**

**Legendary king**
Following the *Mongol Invasion* expansion, *Medieval: Total War* appears. Huge success!

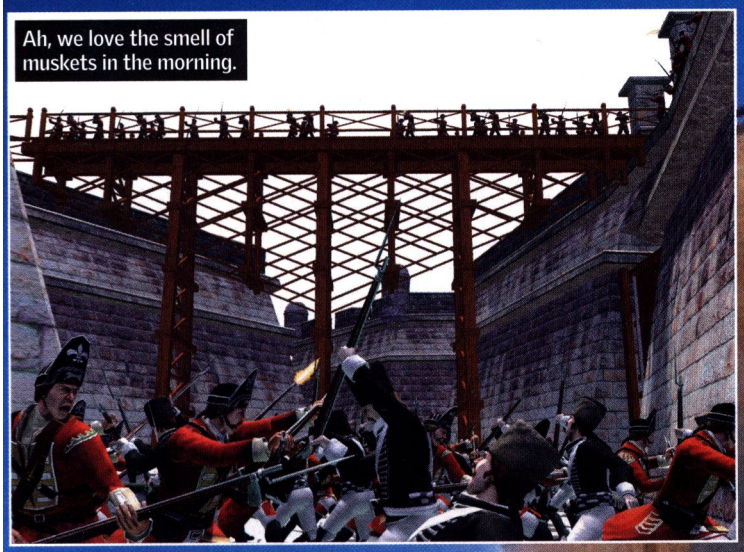


**2004**

**Mighty centurion**
*Rome: Total War* is released – we reckon it's the developer's best game yet.

**2006**

**Prince Charming**
An Australian office-developed sequel to *Medieval* launches. *Kingdoms* follows...



Ah, we love the smell of muskets in the morning.



From another angle, that figurehead *may* look rude.

developed a region is without trawling through a menu to investigate, and in addition use your armies to attack and destroy individual buildings.

*Medieval II: Total War* was a superb game, but more evolution than revolution – *Empire: Total War* is definitely the latter, a complete re-imagining of the famous RTS series, retaining its turn-based map and real-time battles, but introducing a whole raft of new features such as naval warfare and wrapping the whole package in stunning next-gen graphics. Apparently the team have had one programmer working solely on the real-time seascapes for a whole year, and the title will also feature new landscape and flora systems, dynamic weather that'll affect gameplay (rain dampens musket powder, for example) and destructible buildings.

It's still very early days for *Empire: Total War*, but it looks as if this game about conquering the known world could well see The Creative Assembly achieving a massive expansion of their own strategy empire. PCZ

**Vessels will be able to let fly with chain shot, grapeshot, musket fire and cannonballs**



"Guys! Look around you. We're literally fighting over nothing."

REALITY CHECK

# WAR

***Steve Hill* is in the army now...**



**IF I WANTED TO** get up at six o' clock in the morning, I'd join the army. Through the magic of magazines, for one day only, I effectively have. It's a brutally early start that sees me leave Waterloo station for a secret location in the south of England, otherwise known as Warminster, home of The Land Warfare Centre. Apart from the obscenity of the hour, an unscheduled tear-up the previous evening has left me feeling somewhat less than 100%. An excruciating period of internal turmoil ensues, finally coming to a head when body overrules mind and explosively pebble-dashes a South West Trains toilet with a partially digested chicken jalfrezi and half a gallon of cooking lager.

Suffice it to say, it's a decidedly unkempt soldier who rocks up late at the barracks, much to the disapproval of the waiting generals. With formalities at a minimum, we're straight into a stern lecture, essentially a bombardment of acronyms and abbreviations, occasionally peppered with Venn diagrams and bar charts. The upshot is that a while a vulgar amount of money is spent in protecting this sceptred isle from evil insurgents, a few quid can be saved through the use of new-fangled computer simulators.

## HEAVY METAL

Following the chat, we're hands-on with one of those simulators, the obligatorily abbreviated DCCT, which of course stands for Dismounted Close Combat Trainer. According to the bumf, it's "a life-sized firing range simulator and is used as a training aid for troops to practise their shooting skills both as individuals as well as in small teams."

In reality, it's a cross between a light gun and *Dragon's Lair*, involving up to five hapless berks firing away at video footage of a wartime scenario. The guns are anything but light though, being modified actual weapons fitted with a small compressed gas valve to reproduce recoil. I can barely hold a conversation, let alone an automatic weapon, and it's much as I can do to lift the beast and point it in the general direction of the screen.

The action starts in a generic Middle Eastern setting, and when it become apparent that one of the locals is hostile, we gleefully unload on him, peppering his turban-clad body with the

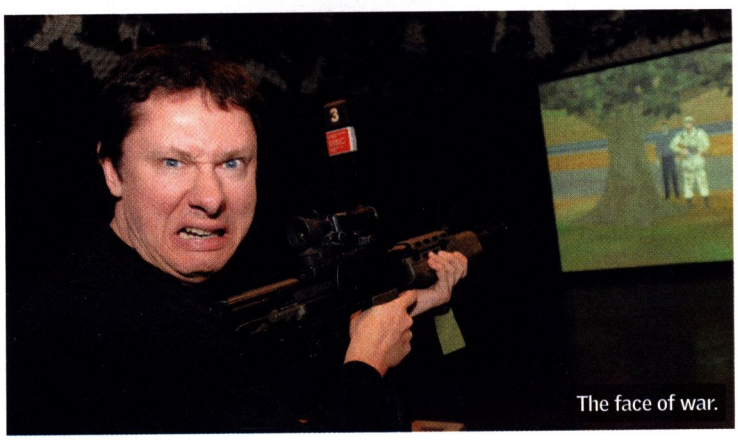
**"I am unfit, overweight, tattoo-free, anti-morning and anti-war"**

British Army's finest virtual lead. If this was a game, he'd have been a mess of internal organs, but being a video, he disconcertingly goes about his business unperturbed. Out of the corner of my eye, I see someone flee from a building and instinctively mow them down. It turns out to be a mother and small child, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

The next scenario starts with a squabble in a back alley, during which one of those present pulls out a gun. He is dealt with quicker than you can yell the word 'getthabastard!', along with a number of bystanders and a few innocent chickens. There are always casualties in war.

## CATT SHIT

Following the virtual killing spree, we are directed to a lecture room and shown photographs of tanks, along with their computer-generated counterparts, seemingly generated some time in the



The face of war.


The world's in safe hands.


We can only assume that's V for victory.

mid-90s. Part of the CATT program, we are now in the realms of the Combined Arms Tactical Trainer. Essentially a glorified version of *Tank Battle*, "CATT consists of 70 closed-down networked high-fidelity vehicle simulators."

In real terms this consists of a massive room populated by sci-fi style pods, each housing a scale-size tank simulator, with the interiors barely distinguishable from the real thing, all connected together like a multiplayer LAN game. Assigned the unlikely role of tank commander, I am issued with a wily Jock and a youthful Scouser, who both eye me with military levels of suspicion. A more improbable soldier it would be hard to find: I am unfit, overweight, tattoo-free, lacking a strong regional accent, anti-morning and anti-war, not to mention caked in Indian food. It's an uneasy alliance, but I break the ice with a familiar Anglo-Saxon word when I crack my head on a vicious piece of protruding metal.

## SHOCK TACTICS

Taking my seat in the command post, it's a cramped affair, but I manage to look out of my slit at a rudimentary version of Salisbury Plain. The enemy have attacked the town of Malmesbury, and it's our job to flush them out through superior firepower and authoritative command. This involves me shouting at the Scouser to shoot anything that moves, and we get involved in a cat-and-mouse chase with a rival tank, finally taking him out despite running over an unfortunate pedestrian in the process.

It's a chaotic business, not helped by a glitch that sees the scenery intermittently flipping upside down, and our war effort comes to an abrupt end when we plough into the side of Malmesbury Police Station.

Back on the real Salisbury Plain, there are real tanks to contend with, although I am severely reprimanded for referring to them as such. They are of course Armoured Fighting Vehicles or AFVs, you idiot. Either way, they can certainly shift, reaching speeds of up to 50mph, much to the delight of the masochistic driver, and the despair of the pasty media buffoon clinging on for dear life. At one point, it seems the jalfrezi may make a reappearance, and it's with some relief that I disembark, spattered in mud, bruised but unbowed.

The debrief is a sombre affair, a stark reminder that we are a nation at war, the bloodshed and bereavement of which seems a world away from playing toy soldiers on Salisbury Plain. One officer asks if I'd ever consider signing up. In true journalistic fashion, I make my excuses and leave. PCZ

## How real is...

### How real is... *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*?

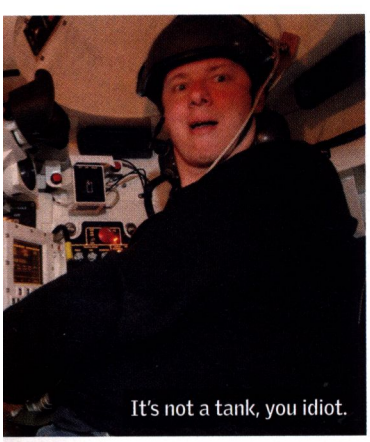
With its comprehensive approach to modern warfare and spectacularly realistic graphics, this is a considerably cheaper attempt at simulating war than setting up 70 bespoke tank simulators in a warehouse in the middle of Wiltshire. With its strong emphasis on strategy and teamwork, the game was cited by a number of soldiers as something that they play, communicating with each other much like in the real simulator, and indeed the real world.

★★★★☆

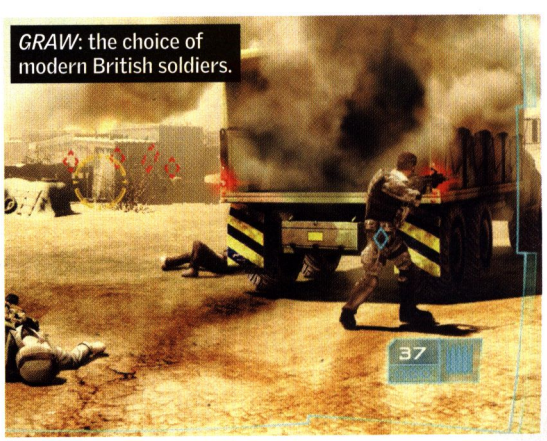
### How real is... *Armed Assault*?

The spiritual successor to *Operation Flashpoint* from the same developer, *Armed Assault* blurs the boundaries between game, simulation and military training module. Compared to the Land Warfare Centre's tank simulator, it is streets ahead graphically, albeit some distance behind the current crop of games. For all its realism, sitting at a keyboard can never compare with handling a real weapon or squeezing in to a fully featured tank interior. Although there is less chance of cracking your head open...

★★★☆☆


It's not a tank, you idiot.


*Armed Assault*: safer than the real thing.


*GRAW*: the choice of modern British soldiers.



**POOR NAZI**
Gearbox describes them as 'Brotherhood Moments', but it's not clear to us exactly what throwing a grenade at a couple of these chaps and having the camera zoom in and show them blasted skywards in slow motion has to do with fraternal loyalty. It certainly could be classed as a 'moment', though.

**BOOM TIME**
This explosion may not be the result of a neatly lobbed grenade, but instead the work of Jasper and Conners – Baker's new specialist bazooka duo. Jasper calls his weapon Stella and talks to it as though it were his girlfriend – quite what he gets up to when the rest of the unit's backs are turned, one can only speculate...

HOT SHOT

# BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

**DEVELOPER** Gearbox
**PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEB** brothers inarmsgame.com/uk **ETA** November 16

**EVERYBODY'S FAVOURITE TACTICAL** war sim remains on the steady path to release. Well, nearly everybody's favourite tactical war sim – some people still moan. Thankfully, though, in this instance the naysayers appear to have been listened to. Baker and his crew are far more manoeuvrable than they ever were before, and environments – previously somewhat staid, boxy and immovable – have suddenly become grittier and physically enhanced. Picket fences can not only be leapt over, but shot to pieces too. Now, if that's not progress, we don't know what is. With a heavy-weapons unit now supporting your squad from behind, and a greatly enhanced cinematic sensibility, a lot of people could be surprised by this one...



**STEALING THE COVER**
As always, the *BIA* 'pie charts of doom' will hover above the heads of nasty Nazis, but now there'll be a fresh signifier of danger. A bit like in *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, if you're behind this wall, for example, with your upper torso exposed, the on-screen area above and beyond the brickwork will turn hazily red, while the 'safe' area remains clear. It's pretty nifty when you see it in action.

**ROAD TO NOWHERE**
This is a countryside farm track, and not the actual Hell's Highway. But it gives us leave to point out that the game's title isn't just your typical overdramatic publisher's creation. It's the real nickname given to Highway 69 during Operation Market Garden. It wasn't a very nice place to be.



ETA 2008

## WANNA BE IN MY GANG?

# SPORE

***Will Porter* discovers what happens when two tribes go to war in *Spore*. After they've had a bit of a dance, that is**

**DEVELOPER** Maxis **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** www.spore.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 177

### THE LOWDOWN

| | |
|---|---|
| Epic story of life itself | ✓ |
| Gorgeously designed and animated | ✓ |
| Could be an outright triumph | ✓ |
| Very simple | ✗ |
| Has it been a smidge *The Sims*-ified? | ✗ |

**SO, YOU'RE AWARE** that *Spore* is a life simulator in which you (as a Play-Doh-wielding god) raise a species up from a single-celled organism all the way through to a planet-destroying scourge of the galaxy. We're on the same page, right? The game, rather like the whole concept of life itself, is far too big to describe in the space allotted – so check with Mr Google if you're not up to speed, then rejoin the printed-page party right here as soon as you can. As we're doing the tribal dance. Baby.

## TROUBLE WITH TRIBALS

After microorganisms come nature trials on land: basically, collecting DNA points from fighting, being friendly or simply nosing through fossils lying about the place. The more you develop the brain and body parts of your little chaps/chapesses and the more sociable dancing you instruct them to do, the more little mates can trail around after you. As soon as you have à posse of three, well, that's where Will Wright goes all Kubrick on us. The music from *2001* fills your speakers, as your odd little quadruped green chaps with bums for eyes (or whatever) re-enact the bone-crushing scene in which the apes are forcibly evolved by the Monolith, the camera spins and (as if from nowhere) a tribal hut appears.

This third stage of *Spore* will kick in two hours into the game – the preceding microscopic and Attenborough-inspired antics lasting a half-hour and an hour-and-a-half respectively. It's all about uniting various tribes of your bum-eyed (or whatever) greenskins through either sociable or violent means – or, more likely, a mixture of the two. It's almost like a scene from the start of an early *Warcraft* RTS map at first, with a few characters on screen doing odd jobs – your little ocularly arsed (or whatever) compadres heading out to fish or kill off the still-small-brained species who you rubbed nose-attached shoulders with formerly. All of which are designed by other *Spore* players, remember. This is a family game, though (a very, very family game), so rather than gnaw on their guts, your beings bend down and create a neat platter of their bodies, before wandering back to the food-storage area like snooty waiters.




Attempts to entertain the neighbours can end in violence, love or simple bemusement.

## SIM EVERYTHING

Meanwhile, you, Mr God himself, will be busy upgrading the tribe with better equipment and facilities in your quest for the magical 15 members that will signal the start of a more civilised age. To do this, you must either send those of anal eyes (or whatever) over to wreck the main hut of a nearby opposing tribe and fill some of them with spears – after which, those remaining will be forced to kowtow to your wishes – or act all sociable. Obviously, your decision will depend on just how you've brought up your little entourage, since carnivorous, pointy-toothed savages bearing clubs won't be quite so good at small talk.

To make nice, you put on your user-defined recruitment glad rags, gather up your food supply and deposit it at the homestead of your rivals, before striking up some sweet, sweet music – with the bum-eyed band (or whatever) tooting away on pipes, banging on drums and doing cutesy-pie dances. A few feet will begin to tap in the audience, and those suitably impressed will defect to your side – it's a bit like a Fisher-Price version of *The Hunt For Red October*. Once you hit the magic number 15 in

THE STORY SO FAR...

# SPORE

**Beginning**
*Spore*'s development begins alongside the far less spectacular *The Sims Online*.

2000

**Evolution**
*Wired* magazine prints mysterious documents about life cycles. Not even they know why.

2004

**Expansion**
After a GDC demo the previous year, *Spore* finally gets the official nod at E3.

2005

**Conquest**
Will Wright creates an army of robots who proceed to conquer the known world.

2023




## No heavy petting

**Lewdness heavily discouraged by EA modesty police**

In a game where all surrounding creatures are created by the actions of other users elsewhere on Planet Earth via the astonishing power of internetz, surely, you begin to think, there'll come a point where an innocent player will come across a tribe of creatures that look suspiciously like male genitalia, only with legs and antennae. You needn't worry, though; with EA fearing a *Daily Mail* backlash, you'll be able to report wrongdoers – and having been given three strikes, they'll be out. In the game, meanwhile, creature-bonking is represented by winks, nods, dancing (surprise!) and the sudden appearance of a giant egg containing the new bum-eyed alien model. Tribals, meanwhile, do their shagging in huts. An 'invisible walls' mod can't be far away...
















your personal brat pack, you'll be free to enter a new age of buildings, cars, aeroplanes and modern-day sphincter-spyhole (or whatever) shenanigans. The whole tribal trip lasts around an hour-and-a-half (it'll take about eight hours to get your charges all the way from amoeba to interplanetary explorers).

It's all great – but I reckon it's worth noting that this is a game that's drifted ever closer towards the mainstream market as previously unseen mechanics of gameplay have been introduced. The dancing, the waiters, the carnivores in humorous poses – *Spore* has always been family-friendly, but now that's more apparent then ever before. There's a distinct saccharine smell of *The Sims* here. What's more, being a hardcore PC gamer, as I know you are, you'll likely find that, while the fundamentals of the game may have been polished to high heaven, your brain has been taxed far more heavily by titles elsewhere on your hard drive. Although, admittedly, they may not have let you present an elephantine, bipedal omnivore with a new mouth. C'est la vie. PCZ

IT BEGINS. AGAIN.

# OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING

ETA LATE 2008

**Everyone gets everything he wants. *Will Porter* wanted a mission, and for his sins, Codemasters gave him one**

**DEVELOPER** Codemasters **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** www.codemasters.com/flashpoint2

**THE LOWDOWN**

| | |
|---|---|
| The most realistic war simulator ever | ✓ |
| 220km² of practically true-to-life environment | ✓ |
| Insanely complex weapon and vehicle design | ✓ |
| Remains true to the *Flashpoint* vision | ✓ |
| Not being made by the original developers | ✗ |

**OPERATION FLASHPOINT IS** PC royalty. It free-roamed before it was fashionable, it was brutally realistic where others preferred you to run around with popguns and its legacy was drilled into stone through a quite remarkable online community.

And now what remains the world's greatest ever war simulator is back – and that old desire for authenticity, freedom and frightening levels of detail hasn't diminished one jot. As a matter of fact, it's more gloriously intimidating than ever before...

"The game is called *Op Flash 2: Dragon Rising*, which gives you an idea of who you're fighting against," says Codemasters' Andrew Wafer by way of introduction. "Dragons?" I ask. "Yes, that's right," nods the man charged with reigniting the *Op Flash* brand alongside the largest design team Codemasters have ever assembled; a team sitting a few yards away in a converted cowshed deep in the Warwickshire countryside, cradling replica assault rifles as they program. "We really thought the fans would like fighting elves and dwarves with machine guns."

But the average *Op Flash* fan... Well, they'll be approaching this project with a fair degree of caution – even if the inclusion of fantasy creatures might not be something they're losing a lot of sleep over. After a parting of the ways between *Op Flash* developers Bohemia Interactive and Codies, the former have gone on to produce the good (although unfinished) *Armed Assault* and are busy working on a still untitled, separate *Op Flash* follow-up. Codies, meanwhile – well, they've been sitting larger and larger numbers of people in a room with 'Operation Flashpoint 2' emblazoned on the walls for four entire years. And now they're in the full swing of creating something that even the hardest of cynics would have to concede is pretty bloody remarkable.

## OPENING SALVO

"The thing about the first *Flashpoint* was that it was really about this bigger conflict," says Wafer, himself a coder back in the day with *Op Flash*. "It was set in the '80s and the idea was that you're the US Army fighting the Russian army. Two global superpowers. With *Op Flash 2*, I thought it was very important that we make sure that it wasn't just about a bunch of guys dropping into a Middle Eastern country and fighting people who are armed with weaponry that can't even penetrate the armour of an American tank. We needed a large-scale conflict, and one in which there was real danger and in which both sides are technically matched."

And so the chaps at the helm of the opposing force are the Chinese – proud owners of the biggest and most secretive army in the world. Not a great deal is known about their capabilities, but when prodded, the men from Codemasters nod and whisper that they have their sources. "We didn't just want to say, 'Ah, y'know – the Chinese kick off! And there's this big world war!'" explains Wafer. "So we've got a whole team of guys who are just there for research – making sure that



*Op Flash 2* will use an advanced version of the Neon engine used in *DiRT*.



As in real war, heavy-duty vehicles play a vital role.



> **"We didn't just want to say, 'Ah, y'know – the Chinese kick off! And there's this huge world war!'"**
> Andrew Wafer, brand manager, Codemasters



everything in the game is authentic. They study battle tactics, global scenarios and politics."

Four years of study have resulted in an archive of research that would put the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to shame (honestly – it's a real shelf-breaker), as well as yielding a genuine, real-world political flashpoint just waiting to have its fuse lit and the UN stand at a safe distance. It's an island located just off the east coast of Russia called Sakhalin, and it'll essentially form the basis of the game's 220 square kilometres of heavy-armament-ridden free-roaming battles.

"On this island, around five or ten years ago, it was discovered that there was a massive amount of oil and natural gas. Some people think there's more here than there is in the whole of the Middle East," explains Wafer, as he calls up Sakhalin's entry on Wikipedia. "So there's a lot of international interest – BP were kicked out by the Russians a couple of years ago, and there are several other companies working there. At the beginning of the game there's a US-backed company operating on this Russian soil, and there's a small contingent of marines there to protect their interests."

What complicates matters is that hundreds of years ago it was owned by the Chinese, after which it was occupied by the Japanese, before (at the close of WWII) being granted to the Russians. And in Codemasters' opinion, with the real-estate value of the island suddenly increasing, something of a confrontation could brew in the real world if and when everyone claims the rights to its tasty oil-rich filling. In their vision, the marine task force is sent there to protect US interests from a Chinese incursion, but then the Russians (caught somewhat unawares) request assistance. It's at this point that you'll be stepping in, occupying the bodies of various men on the battlefield – whether they're on foot, piloting a helicopter or packed tight within the metal belly of a tank.



"Into the kitchen, men, and secure that pie!"

## SLAVES TO ACCURACY

Thing is, even though Sakhalin is being recreated from satellite data, detailed research and beautiful panoramic photos of verdant forests, lonely lighthouses and jagged rocky outcrops taken by newly employed locals and sent to a development house near Leamington Spa, Codemasters are refusing to say that the game is actually based there. Instead, they're giving the island the fictional name of Skira. Why? Well, because they don't want the game to be inauthentic in any way, shape or form – and in their view, claiming the game is set there when it isn't a 100 per cent geographical recreation would be a failing. 'Not being flamed by fans' is clearly of critical importance – it's

## THE STORY SO FAR...
# OPERATION FLASHPOINT

**Cold war**
Codemasters release *Op Flash: Cold War Crisis*, developed by Bohemia Interactive.

2001




**Tepid war**
The *Red Hammer* expansion pack arrives, presenting things from a Russian perspective.

2002



**Warm war**
*Resistance* is Bohemia's second expansion pack; Codemasters now take over the franchise.

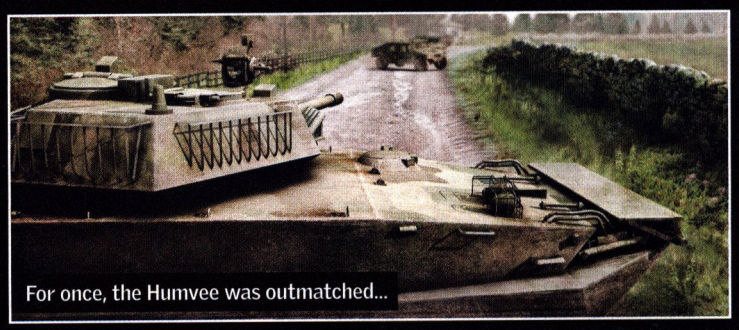
2002

**Hot war**
After a few false starts, Codemasters reveal *Op Flash 2* – can it live up to our expectations?

2007



Johnny consoled himself with the fact that his death would be very realistic.

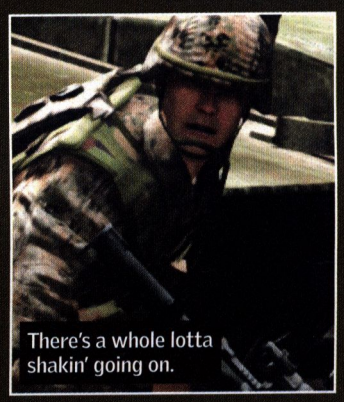


For once, the Humvee was outmatched...

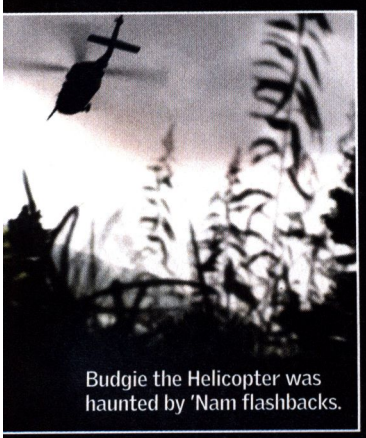
## You must learn control...

***Flashpoint*'s trademark 'floaty' mouse gets a revamp**

One of the most characteristic things about the original *Operation Flashpoint* was its at first bizarre mouse control – enabling you to wave your gun all over the screen for precise shooting, but also turning you around when your mouse reached the edge of the screen. This was in the early builds of the new game too, but has now been axed and replaced by a system simultaneously (and mysteriously) described as 'similar', 'different' and 'better'. In keeping with the jagged on-the-ground stylings, though, when you run, the screen will shake and your aiming will become far less precise – Codemasters are trying to heighten the authentic sense of the confusion and panic of war that goes hand in hand with their precise recreations of real-world armaments.

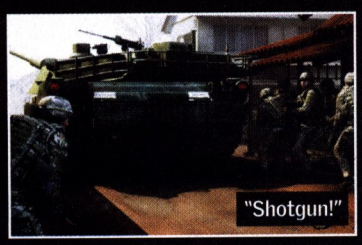


There's a whole lotta shakin' going on.

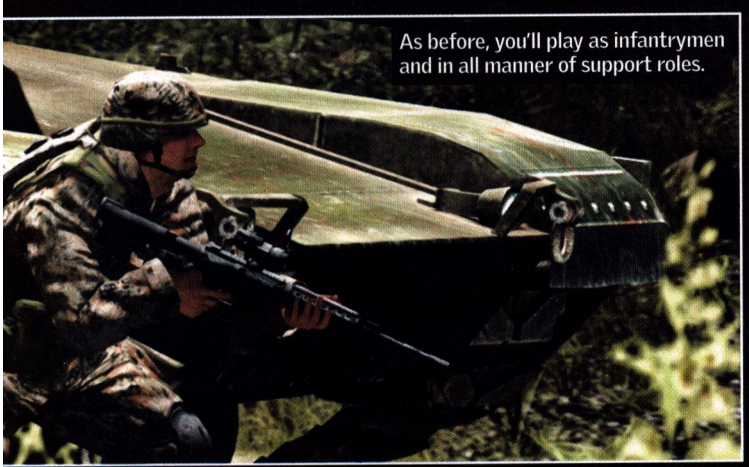


Budgie the Helicopter was haunted by 'Nam flashbacks.

**"The core of the game is the gun in your hand, and it either keeping you alive or not keeping you alive"**
**Clive Lindop, senior designer, Codemasters**



"Shotgun!"



As before, you'll play as infantrymen and in all manner of support roles.

almost like a mantra that echoes through their halls. Codies want the real deal – no more, no less.

So it is that 70 people are currently employed in Kuala Lumpur to ensure that every weapon is modelled entirely accurately – from the bullets it fires to the scope. A single hand grenade is now composed of 5,000 polygons – an entire *Op Flash* soldier used to have only 500. "The core of the game is the gun in your hand, and it either keeping you alive or not keeping you alive," explains Clive Lindop, the game's senior designer, when I meet up with him later on. "We've put an enormous amount of work into replicating weaponry, both in terms of the physical thing in your hand – models and texture-wise – and everything that surrounds it: ballistics, different ammunition types, weights of ammunition, characteristics of the weapons themselves." In fact, the type of ammo you fire from a gun will even affect its range and damage. Anal genuinely isn't the word. Codemasters are talking to veterans and serving soldiers alike (the dialogue and script are sent straight to the Army to check terminology and the exact phrasing), and a large number of developers are themselves ex-servicemen.

It doesn't stop with the authenticity of the shiny sheen on your gun barrel, though. Oh no, sir. Codemasters want the tactics and the way the enemy reacts to you to be entirely real. "As with *Flashpoint*, the enemy will adapt and won't always do the same thing twice," claims Wafer. "They're going to be extremely tactically aware and strategic. You're not fighting a couple of guys – you're fighting a unit that's able to adapt to the circumstances that are going on. You need to think, do I suppress the enemy? Do I call in an air strike? If I do, how will that affect the troops around me? How will it affect the scenario? What you do will affect what the enemy does – they may decide to retreat, or they may throw smoke grenades at you.



"Did I really leave the gas on? Oh, shit! Did I?"

> **"We're not tramlining the player into a scripted set of experiences"**
> **Lee Brimmicombe-Wood, chief designer, Codemasters**

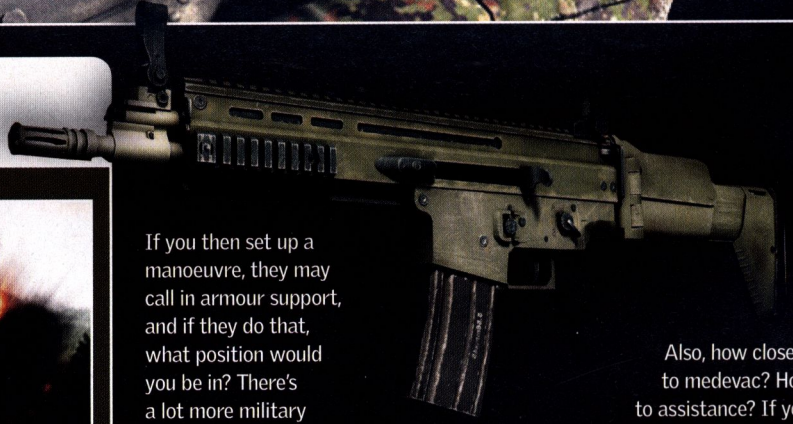
## Where there's smoke...

**What's a war without decreased visibility, after all?**

Among the many 'best', 'most' and 'biggest' accolades the men behind *Op Flash 2* are evidently shooting for are any that have anything to do with smoke. When something smoulders on the unhappy island of Skira/Sakhalin, it really smoulders. Huge, billowing, thick black columns of smoke, rising up into the skies and staying there as long as they would in real life, will not only make the game more realistic, but will also enable you to simultaneously keep your bearings and be suitably awed as you climb over a ridge and witness the remains of an enemy base being pumped into the atmosphere. The best, biggest and most fundamentally gobsmacking clouds of permanent, choking black smoke are what Codies are after – and they're nigh on inhumanly excited about it to boot.



Imagine sound effect... now!



If you then set up a manoeuvre, they may call in armour support, and if they do that, what position would you be in? There's a lot more military tactical thinking going on than in your usual first-person shooter."

I attempt to ask another question, but the list isn't over... "If you make a wrong move, then everyone could be killed – how do you deal with that? Also, how close are you to medevac? How close to assistance? If you get injured, then that's going to affect your performance as well. If you don't get medical attention, then you could bleed to death. You can stay in command or get shipped out – but if you get out, then how will that affect the battle?"



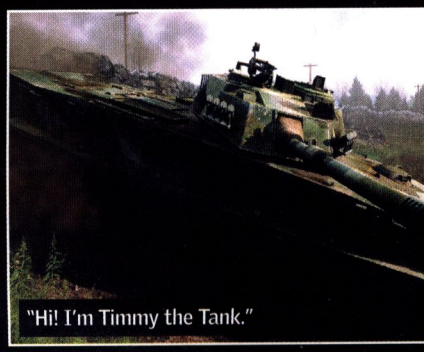
The Heathrow protesters never saw it coming...

### OPEN WARFARE

As the battle rages on over the island, you'll be given a number of objectives that you'll be able to come at from any angle you desire. As the excellently named Lee Brimmicombe-Wood, the game's chief designer, explains to me later on, "We're not tramlining the player into just going down a scripted set of experiences or feelings." So in other words, if you want to flank the enemy miles over to the east, then you



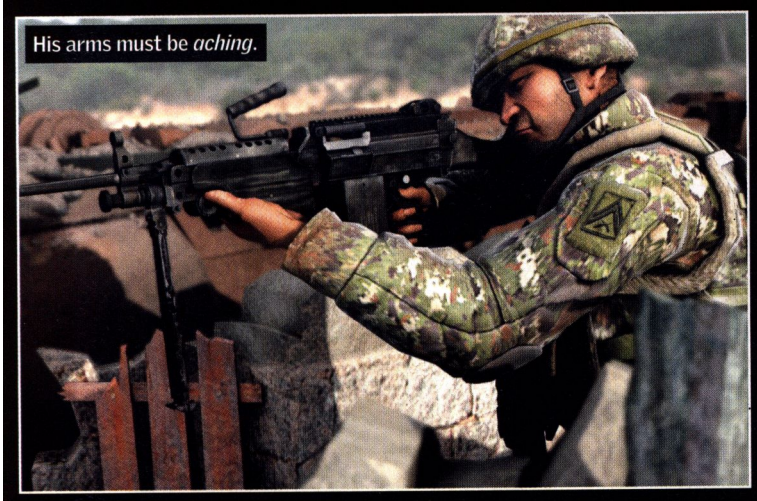
Guerrillas in the mist.



"Hi! I'm Timmy the Tank."



A tank mating dance.



His arms must be *aching*.

## Everything in its right place

**PC, PC and only PC. And consoles too. But only a bit**



Seeing as *Flashpoint 2* is being touted as a game that'll eventually be available on console as well as PC, it's only right and proper that you and I, as dedicated followers of fashion, should raise an eyebrow. I wouldn't worry too much, though – everyone I met at Codemasters went to great pains to assure me that there wasn't a chance of any dumbing down occurring, nor of the PC ever being anything but the prime target for their wares. They know that's where their audience lie – and promise all the modability, all the co-op, all the multiplayer and all the user-created levels that we know and love. The big question is, though, will we still be able to email our efforts in teeny-tiny text files? Your move, Codemasters.

**"As with the first game, there's the sense that you're not Superman"**

**Clive Lindop, senior designer, Codemasters**

can – you just have to bear in mind that your foe could well be doing the same thing to you.

Whatever the case, though, as with the original game, *Rambo*-style theatrics will inevitably result in a rather swift demise. What's more, if you want to survive this mission, you've got to obey orders, and by the end you'll have to know how to give them as well. "Every soldier – thank God – that goes into war doesn't necessarily get killed," says Wafer. "The idea is that we're recreating the tactics and also the body armour authentically, so – especially at the beginning of the game when you're not in command – if you do what you're told you're not necessarily going to be killed the moment you start playing. Also, you'll be with a highly trained group of AI soldiers; they'll be spotting things around you, pointing things out and shooting enemies. It isn't just you on your own versus the Chinese army."

With regard to the game's actual structure, the idea currently being kicked around is that different outcomes to your strategic manoeuvrings will have an effect on the next scenario you find yourself in (making matters harder or perhaps giving you a bit of an edge), lending a rather looser, more realistic feel to the comings and goings of war, while still keeping within the overall linear template of the storyline. And a character-led storyline there will indeed be, bringing a human element to the flames and the cold, hard steel of war. This storyline will be complemented by a documentary-like grounded approach – something comparable to a more hard-nosed, serious attempt at what Epic were going for with *Gears Of War*.

As for the look and feel of the game's proceedings, well, it seems that Codies have the right people in town for that too. In fact, lead artist Michael Field is positively breathless as he flicks through some of the game's concept art with me. "It's a piece of modern warfare, but it's also very beautiful," he murmurs as we look at a tank belching flame in the darkness of night. By the time we hit an image of vapour trails criss-crossing a blue sky, he's so absorbed in his work that his head tilts to the side and he just sits there smiling.

"One of the things you get from television reportage is a feeling of what we're trying to put into the game – the sheer power on display," chips in Clive Lindop. "When a tank fires, there's a wall of concussion, there's a massive flash, the ground shakes and a round as thick as your arm fires at thousands of miles an hour. It's that kind of punch that you often get a very visual signifier of in games, but we're trying to give you a sense of the power all around you, and more importantly, your vulnerability. As with the first game, there's that sense that you're not Superman. You're a guy with a gun with a helmet on that's about this thick – an inch of steel. That whole feeling of shock and awe in a game." And as a result of this, more than ever before, it's all about the long-range combat – projectiles lobbed from miles away bringing untimely death to one and all. There's never been a game quite like it.

### NO NONSENSE

If Codemasters manage to pull this one off, we could be looking at something not seen on the PC for a very long time. While other mainstream developers and publishers are fervently ignoring the hardcore shooter brigade (just look at the dilution of the *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow Six* franchises), Codemasters are showing a keen awareness that their former audience haven't gone away; they've just gone unloved for far too long. And again, there's that concept of absolute realism – an absolute tonic in this age of auto health regeneration and easy-access save points, and a sharp reminder that PC gaming can be something more than what we're so often presented with.

"When we made the first *Flashpoint*, people asked us if we were glorifying war, and we said, 'No – if you play this game you will *not* want to go to war," says Andrew Wafer, as my allotted time at that little patch of rural England that will be forever Codemasters draws to an end. "We've got thousands of these MPEG videos of Americans in Afghanistan and Iraq, and you should see the expression on these guys' faces! Just how nervous they are. That's what we're creating – the realism. Not the Hollywood movie." And amen to that, quite frankly. PCZ



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“This slick, adrenaline pumping high-octane shooter is best described as kick-ass!”
*XBOX WORLD 360*



JOHN WOO PRESENTS

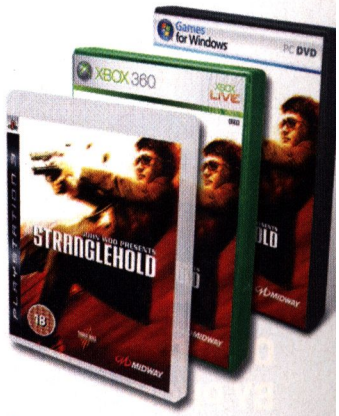
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# REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games



## 62 ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

**Pick your sides as the Strogg and GDF commence battle...**

## A game plan

**MY CHI IS BALANCED,** my spirit fulfilled and my chakras are, um... aglow. Or something like that. And why am I babbling all this spiritual nonsense? Because, dear reader, we're in a state of gaming nirvana. While most of the summer has been barer than Agent 47's noggin, it feels like *BioShock* has finally opened the floodgates for a deluge of great titles.

*BioShock*, *MOH: Airborne* and the *Civ IV* and *Medieval II* expansions headed up things last month. This month we've got *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, John Woo's dove-filled *Stranglehold* and *World In Conflict*, with its gorgeous graphics and multiplayer that's changing online RTS gaming. And there's a bunch of big hitters on the way too – *Crysis*, *Half-Life 2: Episode 2*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Clive Barker's Jericho*, *Call Of Duty 4* and *Unreal Tournament 3*.

So sit back, make yourself a nice cup of green tea, do a spot of yoga and start saving your pennies, because, with all these great games on the way, you'll soon be a skint, hollowed-out, sleep-deprived shell of your former self. Enjoy!

Suzy Wallace

**Suzy Wallace, reviews editor**

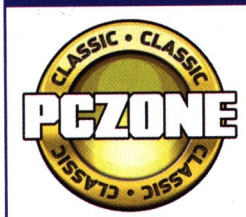
## Must Buys!

***PC ZONE* Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...**

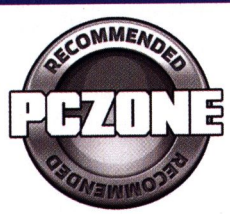



BioShock Company Of Heroes Oblivion

## The PC ZONE Awards




**CLASSIC (90%+)**
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.




**RECOMMENDED (75-89%)**
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns *ZONE*'s head is worthy of your love.




**DUMP (0-19%)**
Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

### AND THE REST




**ONLINE ONLY**
Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.

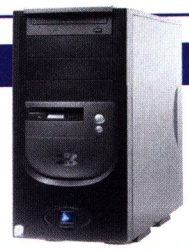



**EXPANSION PACK**
See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.




**ON THE DVD**
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

## The PC ZONE gaming machine



As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com.

## ALSO REVIEWED

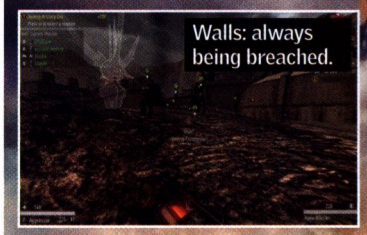

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The best games money can buy, broken down into genres

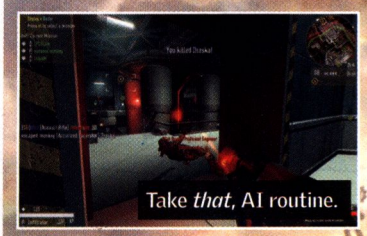

## PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
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- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk



The hovering Desecrator tank – friendly to low-lying wildlife.


Walls: always being breached.


Take *that*, AI routine.

# ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

## The Strogg have come to destroy us all, and *Steve Hogarty* is leading the charge

**DEVELOPER** Splash Damage/ id Software
**PUBLISHER** Activision
**WEBSITE** www.enemyterritory.com
**ETA** September 28
**PRICE** £34.99

**WHEN PLAYING *ENEMY Territory: Quake Wars* with Splash Damage themselves in various playtests for *PC ZONE*, I tended to sit quite near to the bottom of the game's scoreboard. I was, after all, playing against people who'd been building, testing and playing the game for the past four years.**

You can't really compete with a man who's tweaked the accuracy of an assault rifle more times than he's had hot dinners, especially when he's developed some innate cognitive ability to judge ideal firing distances. It's like trying to beat God at water-skiing, with God having invented both the water and the skis. "Hey, come play this game we made," said Splash Damage. "Oh look we're beating you at it."

But maybe there is a way to compete with that sort of person. You often come across a point in an online shooter where you're simply overwhelmed by the skill of other players, times when your health seems to seep out that much faster than your opponent's. But there's a striking realisation to be made when playing *Quake Wars* – and one I think will appeal to people who suck at shooting things – when the constant, unrelenting beatings at the front line finally sink in. It's that moment when you slump in your seat slightly, let out a long whine, and turn your monitor on and off in frustration at the fact that some people are inevitably better than you – but instead of simply despairing at the thought of parachuting back into the battle, you discover that *Quake Wars* isn't just one game, it's many.

### TWO GAMES

Well, it's at least two games, anyway: one where you're actively fighting across the game's 12 maps, capturing objectives and pushing forward, and another where you're supporting and helping out behind the scenes. Each map is made up of several, usually sequential mission objectives, which must be secured to ensure victory. Depending on which side you're on – the earth-loving GDF or the people-hating Strogg – you'll be attacking or defending these objectives. That's fairly straightforward if you've played the original *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, or at least vaguely familiar if you've played *Unreal Tournament's* Assault mode. In fact, if you're a fan of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, just swap Nazis for Strogg and Hitlers for Makrons in your imagination and you'll have a basic understanding of what's going on here.

What's impressive, however, is what else the map offers in terms of tactical options outside of the current main objective (which

### AT A GLANCE...

Team- and objective-based combat across a bunch of great maps. Highly strategic and explosive action, at the hardcore end of the online shooter scale. And it looks pretty sweet too.

**Minimum system requirements:** 2.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card (GeForce 5700/Radeon 9700).

**HOW IT STACKS**

| | |
|---|---|
| WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY | 89% |
| ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS | 87% |
| BATTLEFIELD 2142 | 86% |

## *Quake Wars* can disguise the actions of greedy players as rosy altruism





The GDF Bumblebee has a nice cockpit, but is pretty useless.

is where most of the dying happens). On the limbo screen, when choosing from one of the game's five classes, the mission-critical class is highlighted with a star. That is, if the objective needs to be blown up, only a Soldier with a high-explosive charge can carry it out. If the objective needs to be hacked, only Covert Ops can do the job.

### I CAN HELP TOO

It was then, as now, that I abandoned the Soldier class, deciding I didn't have what it takes to storm the objective. Instead I jumped into the Engineer class, and tapped the M key to see a list of available missions. These are mini-objectives set by my team-mates – requests for repairs or construction. Once I'd chosen one, I set to work with my magical pliers, building guard towers, creeping around the outskirts of the map to avoid the conflict, deploying anti-personnel turrets (whose kills counted as my own), and repairing our radar. Death wasn't as frequent as on the front line, and every mission I carried out was genuinely assisting my team.

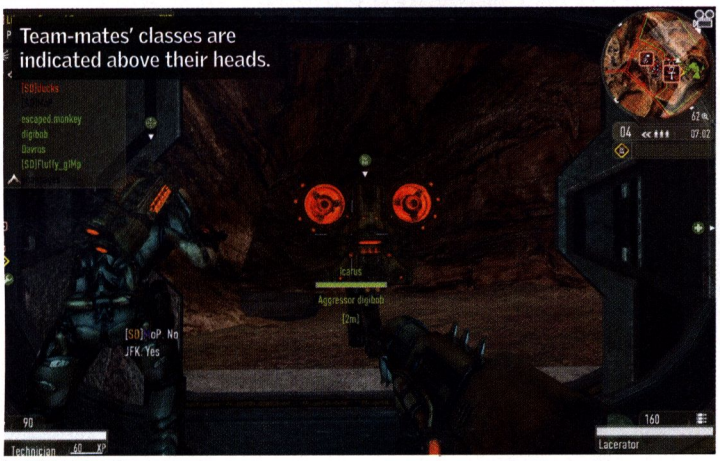
It didn't feel like I was hunting down XP either (XP essentially being the game's scoring system) – rather it felt like I was supporting for the sake of our combined victory. And best of all, the scoreboard reflected this – I'd jump up four or five places after a successful trip around the map repairing broken things.

*Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* nailed this way back. It didn't have the superb mission system, or the ability to use deployables to assist your team, but it did have a wonderful and ubiquitous sense of communism. Players used teamwork to get things done, and willingly helped one another out for the greater good. That ideology never really spread to games like *Battlefield 2*, in which it felt like even medics were out for themselves, reviving you only to get their own pins and medals. *Quake Wars* can, at the very least, disguise the actions of greedy players as






Strogg can deploy temporary shields.
















beautiful, rosy altruism, and it feels every bit as selfless as the original.

## ORDNANCE SURVEY

The two teams, and the setting of each map, are what binds this game to the *Quake* universe (or to some part of it at least – the *Quake* universe never really made much sense). The invading Strogg bombard a near-future Earth, thankfully arranging their attacks into four neat and varied campaigns, each containing three battles, each of which take anything up to 20 minutes to complete. The North American campaign contains your pine-ridden mountainsides and ruined cities. The Pacific campaign contains Canyon, the very first map seen in the original gameplay movies. The African campaign contains a particularly amazing *Stargate*-inspired map (see 'Stargate SG-fun' boxout), and finally the Northern European campaign features a crashed Strogg ship in the Lake District, crushing the daffodils and whatnot.

The latter map sees the Strogg fighting their way into GDF territory to locate their crashed ship, retrieve three energy cells from the surrounding countryside and return them to the wreckage in true capture-the-flag style, while the GDF attempt to prevent all this from happening. The Earthlings can ride their quad-bikes up the massive furrow ploughed by the downed ship in order to surprise the attacking Strogg (or just for a laugh). Most maps contain similar routes designed specifically for vehicles.

The maps themselves are huge, and their focal points and front lines shift constantly as the battle progresses. You'd start off, say, at the Strogg dropship, pushing forwards into some outlying GDF buildings to destroy a generator. You quickly learn the layout of this relatively small battleground, before the objective is cleared, and your spawn point is pushed forward. Now you're spawning at the generator, and putting pressure on some GDF at a nearby bridge. The map has essentially changed, enough to make one map feel more like a collection of separate yet cohesive areas. Couple this with the obvious differences when playing as the other team, and you quickly realise how much content 12 maps contain. Also, the id-developed MegaTexture technology makes everything looks ridiculously detailed – no repeating textures, and none of the graphical weirdness you tend to associate with large terrains, it's all just very pretty. Prettier than what you may have seen in the beta version, which was scaled back. In comparison, if you want to be frank, these maps make *Battlefield's* look like bum. Aesthetically bum, and tactically bum.







## OPPOSITES ATTRACT

The classes and weapons of the opposing teams are similar enough – the GDF employs Soldiers, Medics, Engineers, Field Ops and Covert Ops, whereas the Strogg is made up of Aggressors, Technicians, Constructors, Oppressors and Infiltrators. And yes, those are the same things with different names – funny how much we have in common with aggressive alien beings from halfway across the galaxy, eh? Even the weapons mirror one another slightly, with the heavily touted asymmetry being somewhat overlooked in the name of pure workability. Splash Damage have at least ensured the two teams *look* different, with the Strogg version of the GDF's air-strikes taking the form of a terrifying orbital laser, for example. There are differences that go beyond visuals too,



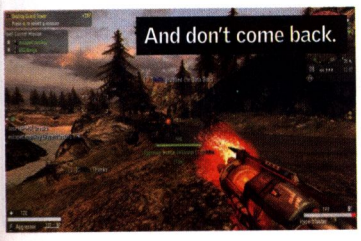

**In comparison, to be frank, these maps make *Battlefield's* look like bum. Aesthetically bum, and tactically bum**

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Weapon and ability upgrades reset after each campaign.

such as the Strogg Technician's ability to turn fallen GDF troops into spawn hosts, allowing for swift counter-attacks from advanced spawn positions. They've also got the Infiltrator's Flying Drone, a hovering camera used to stalk enemies and self-destruct in their unsuspecting faces. The two sides are dissimilar enough for you to care which one you're playing on, while remaining similar enough to not break the balance of power between them.

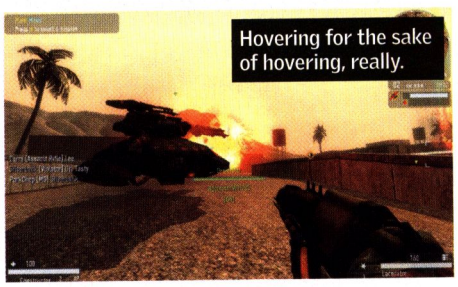
Elsewhere, battles unfold like a violent game of rock, paper, scissors. Deployables, such as the Engineer's turrets and the Covert Ops radar must be maintained and protected – especially as you can only have one built at any given moment. Build a turret effective against people, and vehicles will drive it into the ground. Build one effective against vehicles, and people will giddily stick bombs to it. Build one that launches missiles at targets designated by other players, and, as you watch the blazing ordnance arc slowly through the sky, it might get knocked out by an artillery interceptor turret. Point at this interceptor turret, use the context sensitive menu to issue a request to have it disabled, marvel at the mission system as it displays this request on the HUDs and radars of classes capable of disabling that objective, and watch as your team-mates flock to your aid. Successfully destroy the interceptor and you can try lobbing another missile at the enemy. Or throw down a beacon for the orbital laser instead – they'll have a harder time avoiding that, unless they throw their own bodies on the beacon to prevent its signal reaching the big old laser in the sky. See? It's swings and roundabouts. With cats on the swings, and mice on the roundabouts.


And don't come back.


Like angry angels.

## Vehicular manslaughter

**Oh, a war is it? Let's all bring our favourite kinds of vehicles to the fun**


Hovering for the sake of hovering, really.

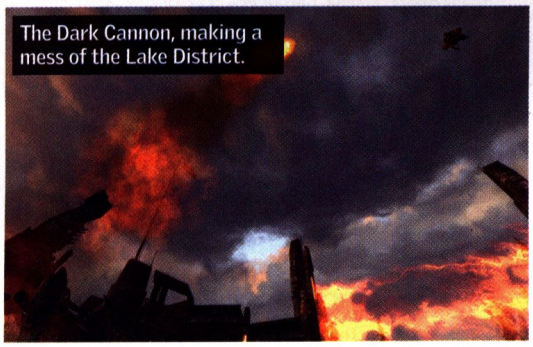
The vehicles of *Quake Wars* aren't immediately comparable to *Battlefield's* or *Unreal Tournament's*. They don't offer as much protection, and they don't have giant blades that pop out the sides. The GDF have jeeps and quadbikes, and a heavy and a light aircraft, and a tank. And an amphibious APC. The Strogg have a hovering tank that can squat down to improve the range, damage and reload times of its cannon, and also get a personal jetpack, the Icarus, which they use to fly above the heads of unsuspecting humans, dropping bombs as they go. Oh, and they've got a great big walking mech. They're all surprisingly vulnerable to rockets though, which keeps *Quake Wars* from becoming too much about vehicular combat. And nobody in their right mind wants that.

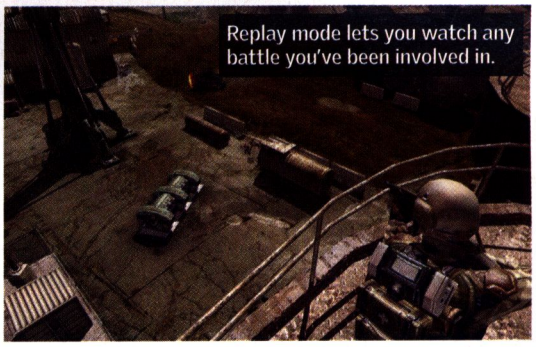
## BOT OR NOT?

These tactics filter all the way down to the bot behaviour too. People whose modems make funny bleepy telephone noises and generate pings as high as an elephant's eye will be pleased to learn that *Quake Wars'* bots make the game a worthwhile purchase for Internetless heathens. Individual sliders for weapons ability and tactical ability allow you to tweak their behaviour, from objective-ignoring idiots who couldn't hit a cow's arse with a cricket bat, to highly-skilled killing machines using tactics you'd normally find only in human players. Tone down the tactical skills of the bots, and they won't do much more than protect their spawn points with mines. Ramp up the tactical skill, and you'll see a Covert Ops bot hop in an aircraft, zip across to the enemy objective, disguise himself as an enemy player – and not just any




**This is generally the sort of quality you should expect when you get Splash Damage and id working together**


The Dark Cannon, making a mess of the Lake District.

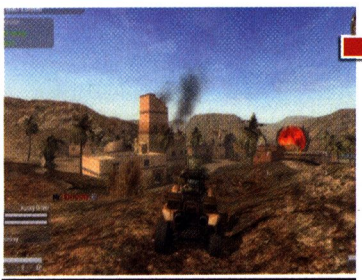

Replay mode lets you watch any battle you've been involved in.

enemy player, one of a class that's crucial to completing the objective – and then hide in the shadows, waiting to back-stab. Why disguise himself as a mission-critical class? Because the enemy are less likely to shoot somebody who might be able to complete the mission for them. What a clever bit of AI. Still, it doesn't stop the occasional hiccup – one bot, while sharing a tank, seemed intent on driving me up into the mountains against my will. Probably to some horrifying robotic version of Makeout Point, the dirty bugger.

The minimum specs cited by Activision will run the game at around 25fps with most of the graphical delights turned off.

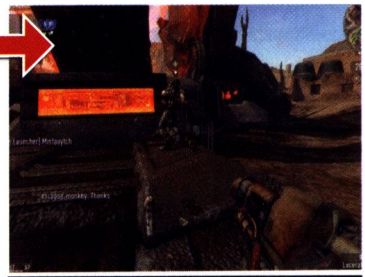
## Stargate SG-fun

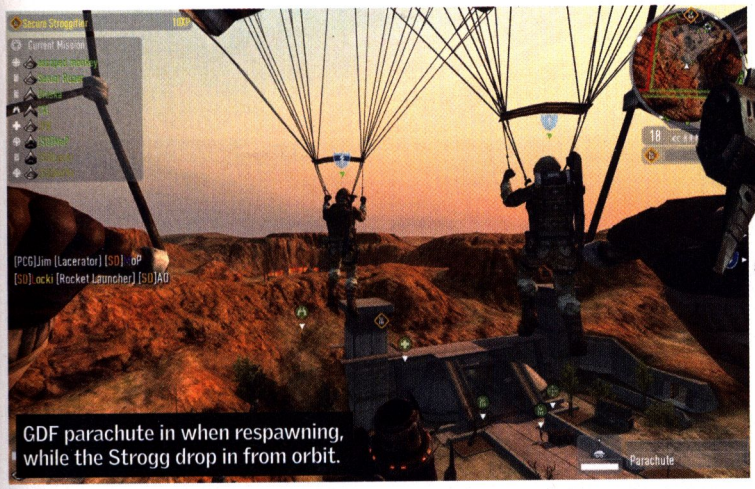
**The African campaign plays host to one genuinely surprising map, which we're going to ruin for you right now with this short walkthrough...**


The GDF start here, in the depths of Africa. It's hot and it's sandy, and the Strogg have a Slipgate. The GDF are trying to hack it...

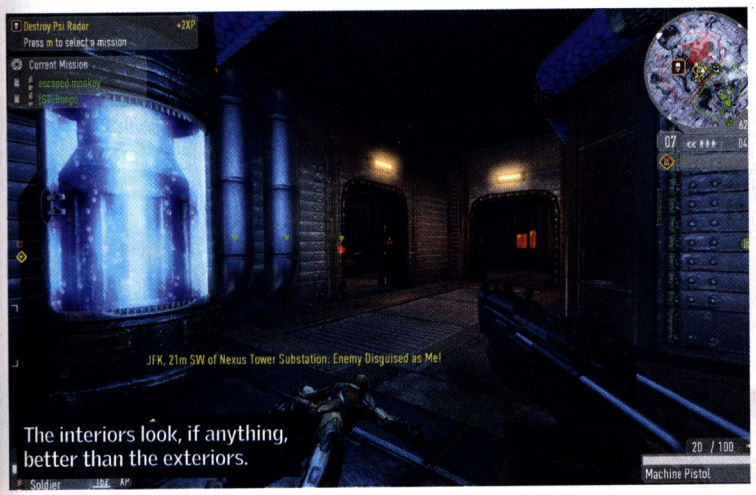

Hacking complete, the GDF prepare to move their mobile command point through the Slipgate. What could possibly be through there?


BLAM! Turns out it's the Arctic! It's cold and it's snowing! That's like, the complete antithesis of Africa. The GDF are sure to catch a chill...

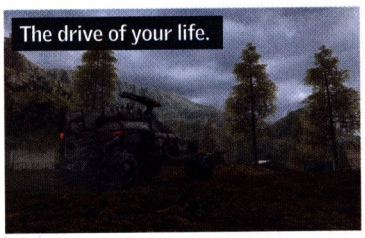

You can run back and forth through the Slipgate as many times as you want, but you can't launch rockets through it. Pah.

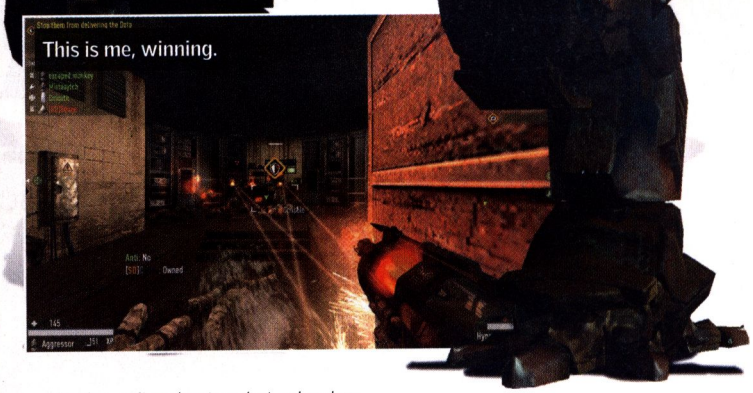


GDF parachute in when respawning, while the Strogg drop in from orbit.



The interiors look, if anything, better than the exteriors.


The drive of your life.


This is me, winning.

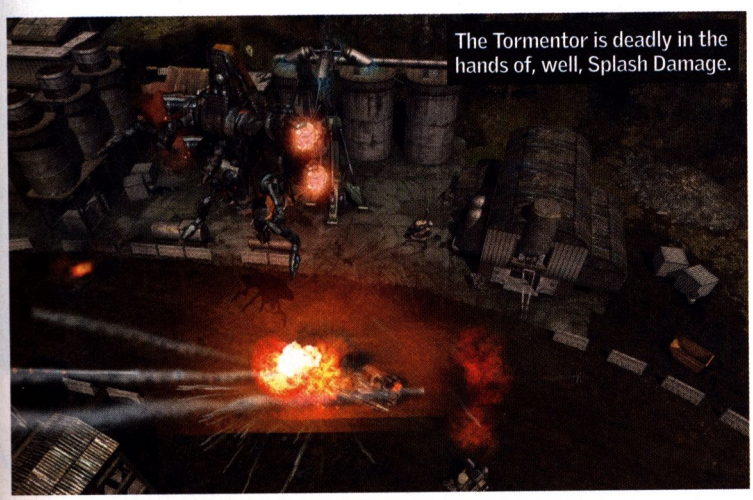
That's not ideal if you're relying on split-second reaction times online, but a pleasing stat nonetheless, especially considering the demands games like *Crysis* and *BioShock* are making on our wallets and hardware. If you're playing with two gigs of RAM and something in the region of a GeForce 7800 card, you can approach the nicer ends of visual sliders and still enjoy a smooth frame rate. This game's built on good tech.

## CORPSE TIME

Maybe it's just me and my caffeine-riddled brain, but one sore point, coming from the position of somebody who's poured hours into the instantly gratifying *Unreal Tournament*, is the downtime between somebody poking a hole in your face with a railgun and you parachuting or rocketing back into the fight. It's integral to the balance, and it ensures that reinforcements arrive in groups, and I also know I should probably try not to die so much, but some people won't have the patience. Staring at your corpse for up to 25 seconds at a time is no way to spend your afterlife. You can hop into the eyes of another player, as with most other online shooters, but only when there's no chance of you being revived and brought back into the battle. It might seem trivial to some, but to others, this downtime has the capacity to seriously irk.

Likewise, the fact that *Quake Wars* has taken this long to come to the table will undoubtedly put some people off, especially in the face of *Team Fortress 2*, as well as *Unreal Tournament 3* and *Crysis*. Had *Quake Wars* been released half a year ago, perhaps it would've made the impact it deserves to make, but right now it's going up against some extremely tough competition.

Regardless, *Quake Wars* is a brilliant and immersive game, and one that fluidly adapts to suit your preferred playing style. Especially if your playing style involves being repeatedly punched in the neck by a biomechanical alien humanoid from Stroggos. We can't say we're surprised by how good it's turned out either – this is generally the sort of quality you should expect when you get Splash Damage and id working together. On the one hand you've got the sheer technical prowess and experience of id, and on the other you've got Splash Damage's intrinsic understanding of what makes a good online shooter. Together, you've got a game that could set a new benchmark for the genre. PCZ


The Tormentor is deadly in the hands of, well, Splash Damage.

**PCZONE**

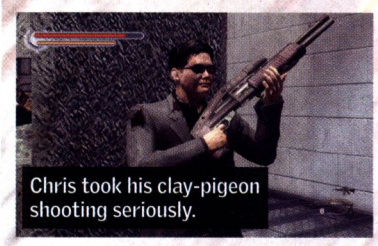
| | |
|---|---|
| Graphics | Stunning, even on mid-range machines |
| Sound | VoIP, and lots of voice commands, some funny |
| Multiplayer | Between 24 and 32 players per map |

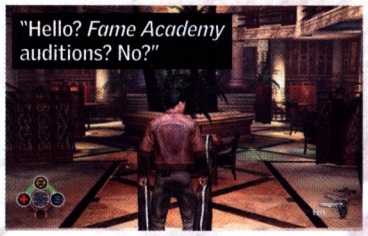
- ✓ Many ways of playing
- ✓ Proper teamwork
- ✓ Truly distinct character classes
- ✓ Deployables offer new levels of strategy
- ✓ Some of the best multiplayer maps we've ever seen
- ✗ The respawn times, plus it's a bit too hardcore for some

**87**

***Battlefield* begone**


There's always time for air guitar.


Chris took his clay-pigeon shooting seriously.


"Hello? *Fame Academy* auditions? No?"

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

# STRANGLEHOLD

## Defying the orders of his pen-pushing superiors, *Will Porter* nestles a cocktail stick between his teeth and goes to work...

**DEVELOPER** Midway
**PUBLISHER** Midway
**WEBSITE** strangleholdgame.com
**ETA** September
**PRICE** £34.99

**A LITTLE WHILE** ago in all the papers there was a story of a man in a Cambridge museum who accidentally fell down some stairs onto several priceless Chinese Qing vases. Was it a terrible accident? Was there a step that had been buffed into slipperiness and was bereft of a warning sign? Or – who knows? – had someone who was a tiny bit mad succumbed to the desperate urge that you and I feel on a daily basis; that inexplicable urge to destroy valuable fragile objects simply because, for a split second, it feels good to break stuff?

Making things fall apart *rocks* – and it turns out that they fall apart even better when accompanied by slow motion, doves and a man with bulging eyes clutching his pierced throat and choking down the last few pints of blood his evil little gangster heart will ever pump. Ladies and gentlemen, please bid a warm, warm welcome to John Woo's *Stranglehold* – the game that lets those of a destructive ilk have their cake *and* jump up and down on it.

A solitary thought will be dancing in your head at this point, and it needs addressing. We have to face the issue of just how much *Stranglehold* fills the void left by *Max Payne*. Short answer: it doesn't. It's a very different game – *Payne* would have you keeping tabs on bullets, being totally aware of the exact position of your foes and using bullet-time to gain a vital edge. Its combat felt weighty and gritty, and was delicately paced to boot. *Stranglehold*, though... Well, *Stranglehold* doesn't give much of a shit about all that.

Many levels progress in a similar vein to those of *Payne* (moving through Hong Kong backstreets and dockside storage areas seemingly reserved purely for flammable liquids and easily dislodged heavy objects), but the true spirit of *Stranglehold* is made clearer elsewhere. Much of the game has you locked in various chambers housing an entire collective noun of fragile objects, with bad guys running in from many and varied inaccessible adjacent rooms, while you run round and round in circles, killing whoever you come across in a fashion that's oddly reminiscent of playing *Robotron* 'back in the day™'. It isn't rocket science, but it's great fun. Tearing around a casino with coins tumbling from broken fruit machines, sliding down banisters in slow motion and shooting gangsters in the face, and watching a central sports car revolving on a pedestal slowly getting taken to pieces by stray shots – for pure daft enjoyment, this certainly takes some beating.

The game really comes into its own when you genuinely fear the bullets madly flying around you, which sadly isn't always the case – above all, in your bullet-absorbent spells in earlier levels. Later on, though, when you're cowering behind shattering pillars in a car park and watching Tequila's gnarled reactions (character design and animation is top-notch throughout) and working out your next act of violence, the blood really does get pumping. Firing


"Ow! God *damn*, that smarts!"



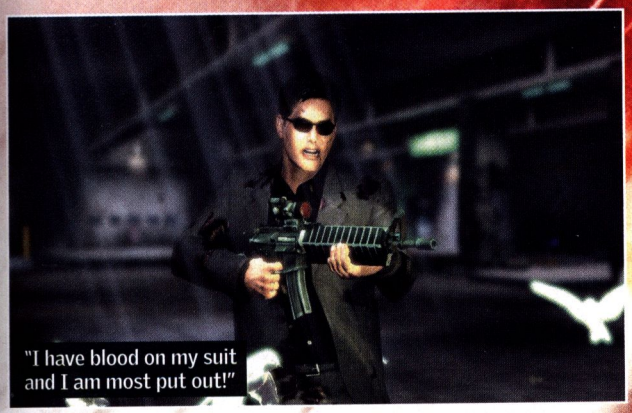
### AT A GLANCE...

Third-person mayhem simulator overseen by action maestro John Woo. More crockery is smashed than in a Greek weekend.

**Minimum system requirements:**
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card with Shader 1.0 support.

**HOW IT STACKS**

| | |
|---|---|
| MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE | 93% |
| MAX PAYNE | 90% |
| STRANGLEHOLD | 79% |



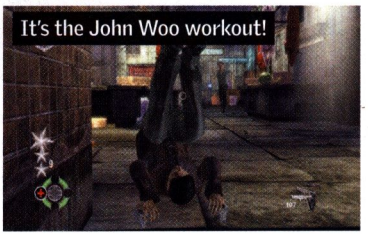
"I have blood on my suit and I am most put out!"

**Much of the game has you locked in various chambers full of fragile objects, with bad guys running in**

**From the off, you're very much aware that the game is more comfortable on a 360**


Tom Cruise had clearly wire-dropped into the *wrong* room.


Woo's *Jurassic Park IV* featured 80 per cent more gangsters.


It's the John Woo workout!


"You're listening to Jazz FM."

through the glass of car windows, using your magic cop powers to fuel sniper shots (see 'Super cop') and having concrete turned to powder around you makes for some brilliantly atmospheric set pieces. It's great bullet-ridden nonsense – even if the slightly ropy cover system makes you wish that the developers had been a little more attentive to the tactical weight of a game like *Gears Of War*, and, indeed, realised that sometimes fewer (and more damaging) bullets can bring greater intensity. A health-pack system with a logic not far advanced from that of *Wolfenstein 3D* and a smattering of old-school boss battles, meanwhile, flag up the fact that at its core, *Stranglehold* is of an extremely traditional blueprint.

Another area where the game veers from the *Payne* template is in its arcade stylings. At times it feels almost like a light-gun game, as glittering objects of note fairly beg for you to shoot them out – perhaps dropping a lighting rig on the head of an unfortunate, or loosening the restraints on some conveniently penned-in boulders just itching to feel the full force of gravity. The controls too are a tad simplistic – Tequila will automatically slip and slide over tables, the spacebar serves for all interaction from taking cover behind a pillar to dangling from a chandelier, and the capacity to crouch is largely redundant in any but the hardest of difficulty settings. I may have resolutely played through with mouse and keyboard without much hassle, but right from the off you're very much aware that the game is more comfortable on a 360 – and is really intended for a widescreen format to boot.

## GUESS WOO

In terms of cinematic overtones, the Woo influence is abundantly clear – aside from the obvious smoke, slow motion and guns a gogo, there are the sharp suits from *A Better Tomorrow* and oodles of nods to *Hard Boiled*, the game's spiritual forebear. Woo himself, for example, cameos again as a bartender, while the tea house shoot-out is replicated alongside a storyline featuring inter-gang conflict and a cop on the inside.

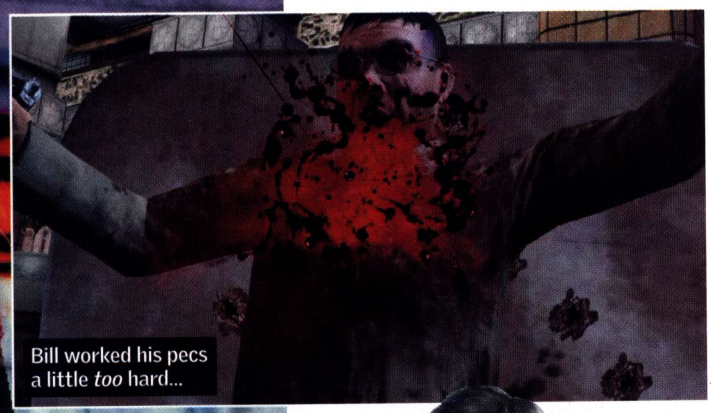
One massive problem that arises, though, is that the game seems desperate to take away a lot of the emotion and humanity of Woo's earlier movies and eschew character

## Ghost from the past

**I'm sorry – haven't we met somewhere before?**

It's always fun spotting references to a development team's past efforts, and don't you think this chap looks a little familiar? These days he's masquerading as a hired goon for a Chicago crime outfit, but I think we're all quite aware that in a former life he was Nick Scryer – *Psi-Ops*'s renegade telekinetic warrior. It's still worth checking out the *Stranglehold* developer's former project, incidentally – it may be getting on a bit now and less flashy, but it conjures a few tricks with physics that even Tequila's adventures struggle to top...


"Knock knock, mofo!"



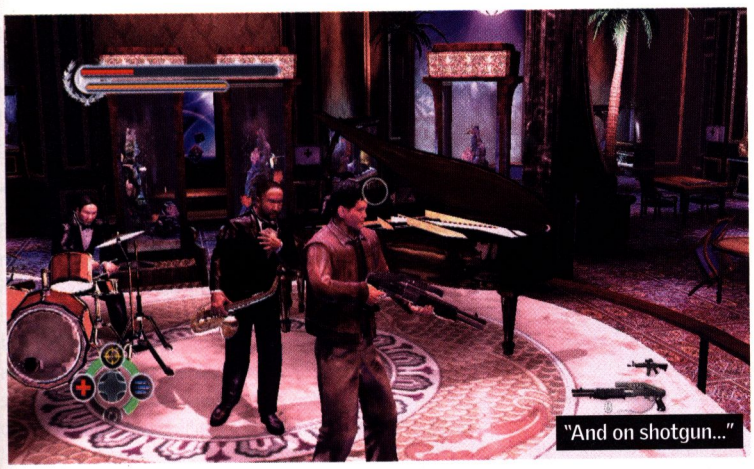
Bill worked his pecs a little *too* hard...



Man, now *that* was a zit.



development for pure stereotype. In *Hard Boiled*, Tequila was a hard-drinking cop on the edge who played the clarinet when he was stressed and occasionally did a little detective work (even if it involved psychically discovering bloodied books in libraries); in *Stranglehold* he's little more than a stroppy, murderous child who should have faced an industrial tribunal long ago. Woo's trademark themes of brotherhood and loyalty are here, but they're skin-deep – and clever stuff such as the famous image of a bandaged Tequila cradling a baby as he takes out hoodlums in a hospital is replaced 100 per cent by non-stop videogame inanity. You may argue that this is a videogame, and as such the inanity is well placed – but had the developers borrowed a sense of pace and character growth from their director alongside his



"And on shotgun..."

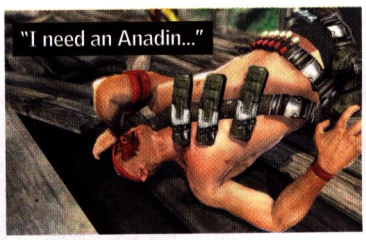
## Super cop

**Examining what happens when Tequila says his secret magic word...**

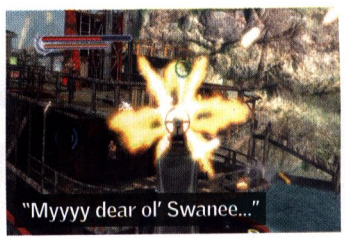
Who knew a career in law enforcement could come with such awesome fringe benefits? The abilities to patch up bullet wounds, zero in a head shot with a pistol, fire lots more bullets than usual and clear a room full of wrongdoers by spinning around screaming a lot – and all of them earned through how stylish your kills have been! Quite remarkable. Someone should inform the Metropolitan Police. To be honest, though, Tequila's special powers are really only a nice topping on the main dish that is *Stranglehold* – violent cherries adorning the gameplay pie rather than the nutritious filling. As, indeed, are the occasional staged stand-off situations in which you dodge bullets by leaning left and right and pump lead at a sequence of villains. Not exactly hyperrealistic, but jolly good fun all the same.



"Helloooo, ladies. Fancy a little 'pump action'?"



"I need an Anadin..."



"Myyyy dear ol' Swanee..."

action smarts, the title would have been improved dramatically. It's as if the themes of Woo's films have simply been stretched paper-thin over an archaic game format of goons and bosses – owing just as much to *Streets Of Rage* as it does to *Max Payne*. If the ringing cliché of 'all style, no substance' ever needs another airing, then perhaps this is where it's required.

But what style, though! As a 'bull in a china shop' simulation suite, there are few flies on *Stranglehold*; its sheer love of stylised murder and incessant destruction makes it a creation that's impossible to dislike at its base level. It doesn't take very long to realise that you're playing the same burst of action again and again, but it's an enjoyable slice of violence, so perhaps we shouldn't judge too harshly. Indeed, the game's lowest ebbs occur when it attempts to cover up this fact – for example, when it demands that you find and destroy a certain number of drugs labs before you're allowed to progress, and inevitably has you grudgingly backtrack through piles of bodies in a remote fishing village looking for telltale smoke signals. A far more aggravating issue is, once again, the increasingly common plague that is a surprisingly short playing time – I probably whipped through it in seven hours or so. A fun multiplayer mode in which six players can launch themselves around seven different arenas in teams or on their respective tods is worth a bash, though – not least because it borrows the ace slo-mo dynamic from deathmatch *F.E.A.R.*

Let us return, however, to that vase-destroying incident in Cambridge. Because it's that, and exactly that, I had in mind as I laid waste to the exhibition halls of the Chicago museum with more bullets than are currently available in a central African democratic republic. I'd shot every bone of every skeleton, every ammonite, every painting and every dangling pterodactyl – only to turn a corner and be faced with a giant poster advertising (oh, happy day!) the entirely coincidental presence of a room full of priceless terracotta warriors shipped straight in from the motherland. I'm telling you – myself and Chow Yun-Fat, in unison, practically rubbed our hands with anticipation. Sure, *Stranglehold* isn't a perfect game – in fact, in many areas it's a bit duff. But even if the stupidity and brevity gets you down, I guarantee you won't have played a better representation of such utter, needless carnage. PCZ

**PCZONE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Graphics | Often dazzling, not always |
| Sound | BANG! CRASH! ARGH! WHOOP WHOOP! |
| Multiplayer | Six-player stand-offs |

- ✓ Beautiful destruction
- ✓ Lovely character design and animation
- ✓ Intense, fast-paced action
- ✗ Relentlessly old-school
- ✗ Ultimately short and shallow

**79**

**Tequila. He makes us relatively happy**


Trouble in the high-rises? Just dangle a few tanks outside the windows...


War is purdy.

# WORLD IN CONFLICT

**DEVELOPER** Massive Entertainment
**PUBLISHER** Vivendi Games
**WEBSITE** www.worldinconflict.com
**ETA** September 21
**PRICE** £34.99

## Or as Kubrick would have put it, how *Suzy Wallace* learned to stop worrying and love the bomb

**ONE OF THE great things about working on this magazine is that I get to witness cutting-edge computer rendered graphics on a regular basis. But barely ten minutes into *World In Conflict* and I'm harping on about its graphics so much that members of the team have slowly begun to edge away from me on their wheelie chairs. But sure enough, any passers-by who are foolish enough to look at my screen are sucked in like a spider caught in a draining bath. And it's not hard to see why. This game is bloody gorgeous. Just take a look at those screenshots. And then imagine it moving at 50 frames per second.**

### COMING TO AMERICA

Unless you've been hiding under a rock somewhere for the last six months, you'll know that *WIC* is set in 1989 at the peak of the Cold War. The Soviets, on the brink of internal collapse, have invaded France (one can only presume for the wine and cheese). They then spread forth into other parts of Europe before eventually landing on US soil and bringing the fight to America. Well, that's the basic timeline, anyway – in actual fact, the missions start off with the invasion of America, hang around for long enough to give you a good feel for what's going on and then flit back four months in time to Europe before returning for the last set of levels. A bit like one of those flashbacks in *Lost*. Only without the polar bears, tropical island and plane crash of course.

You enter the scene as Parker, a relatively green Lieutenant fresh out of the academy, alongside a cast of well-acted and convincing counterparts, including the hard-nosed, no-nonsense Colonel Sawyer, the increasingly annoying loose cannon Captain Bannon and other notable characters. The stories of the soldiers involved and their relationships with loved ones is told through a series of hand-drawn screens between missions. These well-written snippets add some much needed humanity to the conflict and some of them are, at least for my emotional self, quite moving. They also serve to endear the characters to you – in contrast to most RTS titles where you probably couldn't name a single participant. By about halfway through, I found myself really feeling for the personalities involved.

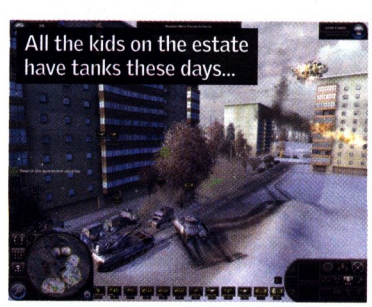
Aspects of each character also play a role on the battlefield, but without wanting to ruin anything, you'll have to play to see what I mean. Loading screens also spell out what's happening mission-wise and are excellently narrated by the gruff-sounding Alec Baldwin. (Who's obviously found some spare time away from shouting at his 12-year-old daughter – check YouTube if you don't know what I'm on about.)

### IN THE LINE OF FIRE

So on to the missions themselves. One problem often encountered in the RTS genre is that the missions can, after a while, really start to feel quite similar. But developers Massive Entertainment have really outdone themselves here with the content and variety, as the campaign never feels dull or repetitive. Levels are generally huge, sprawling affairs in which objectives commonly involve taking and then holding an area (similar to the Carentan mission in *Company Of Heroes*), but also include defending bridges, taking out helicopter bases, searching buildings for personnel and blowing up power stations.

Completing a main objective opens up another one, meaning gameplay is fast-


Suburban commandos.


All the kids on the estate have tanks these days...

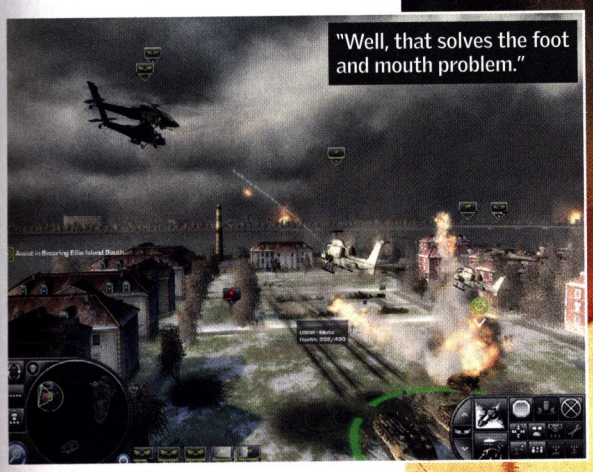
### AT A GLANCE...

Tactical RTS set at the end of the 80s when the Soviet Union gets bored and decides to start WWIII. Complete with stunning graphics, the prettiest explosions you're ever likely to see and innovative multiplayer.

**Minimum system requirements:** 2.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

**HOW IT STACKS**

| | |
|---|---|
| COMPANY OF HEROES | 93% |
| WORLD IN CONFLICT | 92% |
| GROUND CONTROL II | 84% |







**Having so much to do and so little time can get quite fiddly. However, you've just got to learn to multi-task**

paced and on occasion, hectic to the extreme. At any one time you can be waiting for reinforcements to drop, ordering the next batch, fighting raging battles in different sections of the map and calling in tactical aid, all while trying to complete the objectives of the level. Phew! But it was here, under fire on all sides by the enemy, that the first niggle began to rear its ugly head.

In their wisdom, Massive decided to remove the ability to issue orders while the game is paused. They reckon it's because it affects the flow of the game. In most missions, that's true and you'll happily make it through the level uninterrupted. But on one level that I was finding particularly tough, I just had so much going on that I yearned to be able to pause and dish out a batch of commands to my different groups. For that certain brand of RTS player who likes to sit back and take things slowly, having so much to do and so little time to do it in can get quite fiddly. However, as my skills in the game advanced, things did become much easier. You've just got to learn how to multi-task efficiently.

## TROOPS AND TACTICS

Each mission begins with a certain number of reinforcement points with which you can call in more units, the immersion levels maintained by having a transport aircraft fly low to drop them off by parachute. Exactly which units are available to you varies in each mission, with some focussing on infantry roles and others on tanks, while an all-helicopter level is also present. Once your units

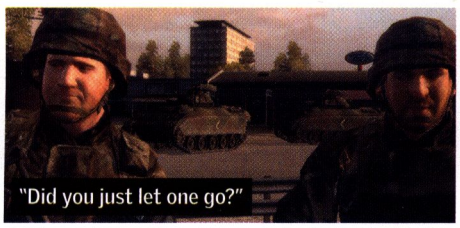






## Eighties throwback

**If only the Colonel had opted for a New Romantic style...**

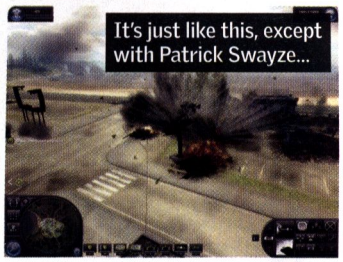


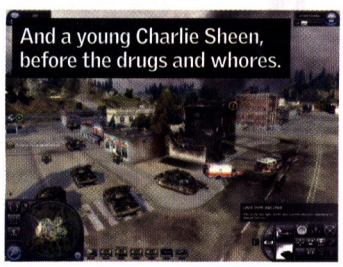

There are plenty of subtle and not-so-subtle references to the historical period the game's set in. First off, in the Manhattan level, you'll notice that the Twin Towers are correct and present in their pre-9/11 form. But my favourite is in a cut-scene where two soldiers are chatting to each other. One pulls a bulky black box from his pocket. "Hey, check this out. My daughter bought it for me." "What is it?" asks his friend. "It's a portable CD player. Imagine that... portable!" It's just one of a collection of neat little narrative snippets that help the game along and contribute to the overall sense of polish.










have been reduced to tiny little pieces, their equivalent points slowly trickle back to the sum available to you, meaning that you'll never find yourself completely out of units.

Also present on many maps are allied forces, fighting hard to achieve their own objectives and reinforcing the feeling of being part of a much bigger campaign. There are also some particularly noteworthy mission settings which I don't want to ruin for you (although the mission after you first witness the nuke deserves at least a mention), and the game features a lot of fighting in suburban areas. Fighting through streets and between people's houses is an exciting change from the normal gaming battlefields, and thankfully no-one seems particularly bothered about collateral damage. Although the insurance companies might have a thing or two to say later...

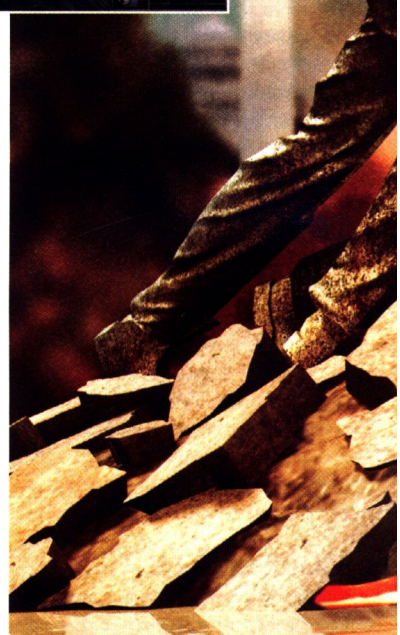
Tactical influences from the *Ground Control* series are apparent, with infantry gaining bonuses when garrisoned inside buildings or moving through forested areas, and each unit having its own special abilities. Tanks are most vulnerable to attacks on their flanks and rear, and each unit also has its own particular vulnerabilities.

Steaming in with all your troops may work on occasion but pick your fights well with the correct units in the right positions and everything will suddenly get a whole lot easier. Even the well-timed deployment of a unit's special abilities can, at times, be enough to swing a battle in your favour.

## DROPPING THE BOMBSHELL

Of course, one of *WIC's* highlights is the ability to call in back-up in the form of Tactical Aid. Gained by capturing territory and sending enemies to a happier place, this is another encouragement to keep you pressing forwards. Besides the much-touted nuke, there's an impressive selection of carnage and destruction on offer, ready for you to order and take away, like some sort of military Argos. Radar sweeps, napalm strikes, laser-guided precision bombs, air-to-air strikes, carpet bombing and heavy artillery are just some of the helpful bonuses on offer.

The list is impressive, with each having its own strengths and weaknesses as well as different areas of effect, but it's the accompanying visual effects that I've been





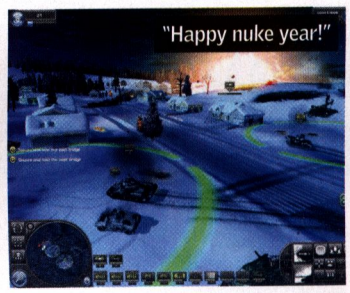






**The well-timed deployment of a unit's special abilities can be enough to swing a battle in your favour**




boring my work colleagues to tears with for the past two weeks.

I mean, who would have guessed that explosions could be so beautiful? Those blinding flashes of fire, smoke and debris, in which buildings, infantry and units alike are decimated and blown to pieces are so often an afterthought in other titles. But here, they're real showstoppers. Call in a tank-buster attack, wait for the tiny little counter to run down to zero and turn your eyes skyward. In hurtles a plane, swooping low to the ground and strafing it with its guns. Tanks explode in beautiful fashion, flames licking into the sky and turrets spiralling away, while debris and smoke fill the area and the ground deforms into a crater.

## BLOW SHIT UP

After calling in a laser-guided precision bomb on one particular building, I remember jumping about in my seat like a child who's just eaten the entire pick 'n' mix section because the resultant clouds of smoke looked so bloody realistic. I believe I even muttered something to myself about it looking so soft, like it was candy floss. Only grey. And with bits of building in it. That's what this game reduced me to.

Daisy cutters drift slowly down before causing a huge circular explosion. Jets deliver fuel-air bombs as a spray of fuel in the air, before igniting it for a spectacular, aerial explosion. Heavy artillery salvos arc gracefully over the battlefield before crashing down to earth with a ground-shaking explosion. Shockwaves spread out from explosions too, knocking over trees and power lines and even affecting nearby helicopters.

And then of course there's the nuke. No matter how many times you've read about it, your reaction upon seeing it for the first time will still be the same: awe. Jaw on the floor awe. The first time I witnessed the blinding flash of light followed by the mushroom cloud rolling skywards was one of my most memorable moments of RTS gaming. But despite being a highlight, the explosions are certainly not the only thing that's impressive in terms of eye candy.

## A REAL LOOKER

Perhaps surprisingly, the game runs well on a minimum spec rig and still looks quite good. But turn the settings up on a high-end machine, zoom right in and the rewards are massive. Units

**The online side of the game is a real triumph, melding unique gameplay with some excellent balancing and hopefully attracting a whole new crowd to the RTS scene**

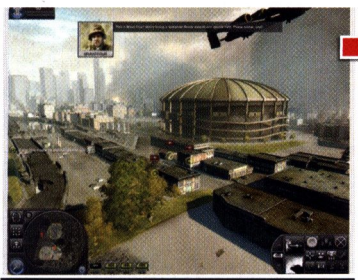




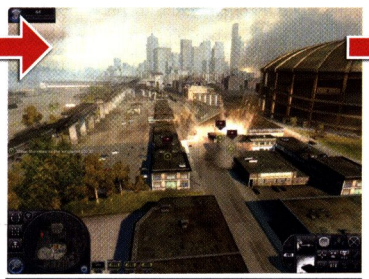


## Death from above 1989

**Occasionally you'll find yourself up against enemy units garrisoned in buildings. But that's not a problem in *World In Conflict*. You just hop on the radio...**



Right, these three buildings are swarming with enemy units. Try to pass them in an armoured vehicle and you're likely to get your butt kicked.



The solution is simple. Select an artillery barrage from under the tactical aid menu and sit back and relax. Here come the first shells now.



The barrage strikes home with devastating effect. If any enemies are still alive in there, the chances are they won't be for long...



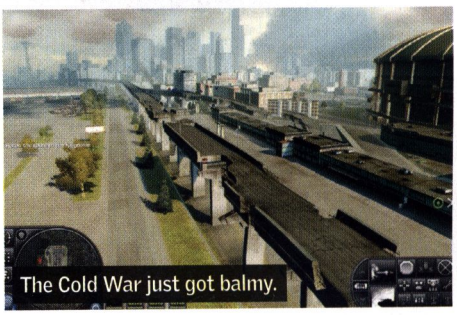
Job done, block annihilated and now your vehicles can trundle happily on their way to the next objective. Good work, soldier.






## Sleepless in Seattle

**Oh, that's just what you need on your morning commute...**




We'd played through a few American and European missions in preview code before we reviewed the game, but upon booting up the first mission of the campaign, we were treated to a mission we'd not seen before. And it's not hard to see why Massive kept this one under wraps. It's set in Seattle on the day of the Soviet invasion, and is truly impressive. Cargo ships line the docks, unloading their precious cargo of armoured Russian units, parachutes and transport aircraft drift through the sky in front of the Space Needle and towering skyscrapers in the background, bomber aircraft swoop down from the heights dropping their payload onto buildings and reducing them to rubble, artillery fire pounds targets and Russian troops move through the streets. It's a spectacular opener in anyone's books, dropping you right in the middle of the battle and introducing *WIC's* hectic combat in one swift move. With any luck, they might have taken out Tom Hanks and his idiot child too.










are excellently modelled and wrapped in such gloriously hi-res textures that the detail on them is enough to make a military figure collector weep with joy. Individual buildings feature perfect detailing, from American donut shop signs to tiny little balconies on the quaint French seaside buildings. There are tons of minute little details like muzzle flashes, trees swaying in the breeze from helicopters and tracer rounds. And that's not even mentioning the water effects. In fact, at times it looked so good and there was so much going on in the background that I just saved my progress and took a leisurely scroll around the level just to watch the carnage unfold in peace. It's all helped out by the excellent camera too, which, despite an initial period of getting used to, allows you to easily switch between a standard, almost top-down view for ordering units about, to a great view of the entire battlefield that extends off into the horizon. So you can just sit back, put your feet up and admire the sunset.

## WAR BETWEEN FRIENDS

Of course, I haven't even mentioned the multiplayer yet and this is really *WIC's* trump card. Its novel approach means that players can drop in and out at any time, choosing to take one of four different roles on offer with the whole thing feeling far more similar to a round of *Battlefield* than any other RTS. The guys at Massive have done a wonderful job of making games easy to get into thanks to the Massgate system and also of balancing the different roles, with each unit being vulnerable to certain attacks. While most newcomers will scrabble to play the air-support role, experienced infantry players really show how things are done, using cover to their advantage and proving that there's a way to combat every attack.

Unlike most online RTS titles, the reliance on teamwork here is huge. Playing with a disorganised team or setting out on your own will demonstrate this, as you'll quickly be decimated by a better-organised foe. Options such as the ability to tag areas of the map with support requests (twinned with excellent VoIP support) allow organised teams to efficiently co-ordinate attacks and provide back-up to fellow team members, conferring a huge tactical advantage. I guess the moral here is to practise in the single-player mode to familiarise yourself with the different units before teaming up with a bunch of efficient players to go online. (Not a rabble of disorganised games journalists who are only pooling all their tactical aid points together in order to see the fabled nuke.)

Back when we first heard about Massive's plans for the multiplayer, we were intrigued, but weren't really sure if it would actually work in-game. But the online side of *World In Conflict* is a real triumph, melding unique gameplay with some excellent balancing and hopefully attracting a whole new crowd of players to the online RTS scene. In fact, I'd even go so far as to say that *WIC's* revolutionary approach to multiplayer is worth the asking price alone.

## WINNING THE DAY

But luckily, that's not all. Not happy with the finest and most inventive RTS multiplayer experience around, Massive have also added 14 levels of cinematic, action-packed mayhem, complete with a slightly silly premise made believable through some well-drawn characters and intimate cut-scenes, and wrapped the whole lot in the lushest and most drool-worthy RTS engine we've ever seen.

It's a stunning achievement and one that puts it firmly at the head of RTS titles for the year. Can the forthcoming *COH: Opposing Fronts* topple it? That remains to be seen, but one thing's for sure. *World In Conflict* isn't going down without a fight. It's got nukes. And isn't afraid to use them. PCZ

**PCZONE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Graphics | Sublime visuals, gorgeous explosions |
| Sound | Great voice-overs and sound effects |
| Multiplayer | Unique, wonderful and heavy on teamwork |

- ✓ Revolutionary multiplayer
- ✓ Amazing graphics
- ✓ Best explosions ever
- ✓ Hectic gameplay
- ✓ Good characters for an RTS
- ✗ Might be too hectic for some

**92**

**A tactical nuke of a game**



Siamese ghouls or clipping problems? You decide.

# TWO WORLDS

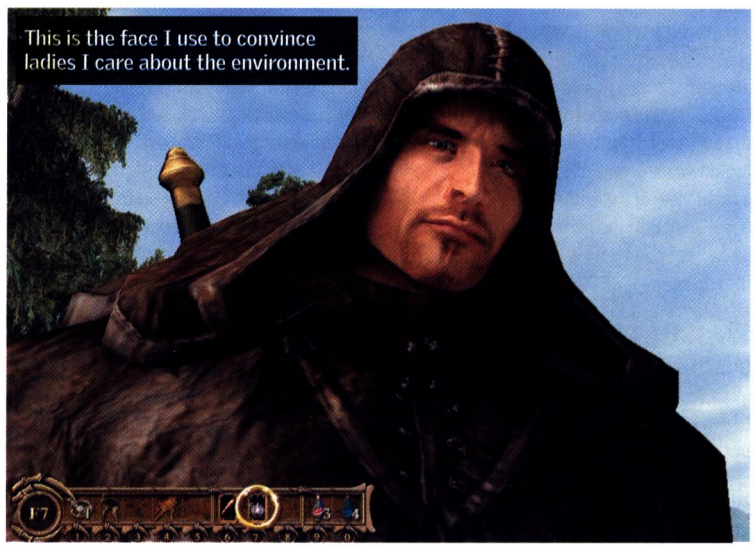
## *Jon Blyth* buys one world and gets one free – but did he really need two of them in the first place?

**DEVELOPER** Reality Pump
**PUBLISHER** Southpeak Interactive
**WEBSITE** www.2-worlds.com
**ETA** Out now
**PRICE** £29.99

**ONE OF THE GREATER** pleasures of *Oblivion* was the ability to roam around a lovely world, discovering crypts all by yourself and getting the lighting to reflect off your new armour in an appealing way. The main quest was nothing but a distraction from fannying about and putting oranges on people in the pub. *Two Worlds* makes similar claims at freedom, and it too boasts a large world, some fairly lovely graphics, lots of side quests and horse-riding antics. A lot of everything I've come to expect; but at the risk of sounding like Lloyd Grossman, it lacks a certain fullness and finesse.

Combat is old-school hack-and-slash, with the left mouse button for your weapon and the right allocated to the skill of your choice, be it roguish traits such as trapping and dirt-kicking or more conventional magical skills. Speaking of which, you start off with a fireball and heal spell, but once you've found the guy who unlocks new spell disciplines (people have the annoying habit of not staying in one place when you're not there), you'll be able to build your collection of spell cards and booster cards. It's a nice system, even if it does have the off-putting terminology of *Yu-Gi-Oh*.

However, combat is made significantly less entertaining – encrappened, if you will – in a number of ways. For one, your rapid deaths and unpunished resurrections almost encourage you to slowly defeat a band of tougher enemies by picking them off over a number of lifetimes. That is, until you realise you can entice those enemies to health-restoring shrines, which refill your energy quickly enough to render you nearly immortal while you club away at enemies you shouldn't really be able to beat. It's not a huge complaint, but you get so used to being outnumbered, killed and brought back with a cheery "I live again!" that you come to accept dying a lot as part of the job. It distracts you away from self-improvement into tinkering with the game mechanic.



This is the face I use to convince ladies I care about the environment.

### AT A GLANCE...

A hack-and-slash RPG in a freeform world, where humans and orcs simply won't get on. Think *Oblivion* meets *Diablo*, only less so.

**Minimum system requirements:**
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 2.0 support.

**HOW IT STACKS**

| | |
|---|---|
| OBLIVION | 95% |
| GOTHIC 3 | 85% |
| TWO WORLDS | 73% |

## Coming attractions

**What is, what might be and what isn't**



Behold, the Jizzlobber.

The single-player game is finished, but for a few gameplay and bug fixes. The multiplayer side is still getting work, though – the slightly discussed horse-racing feature is definitely on the cards, although whether spectators will be able to bet on proceedings is still up in the air. Another interesting feature mentioned earlier in the year was the possibility that unique combinations of game items could be named by the first person to create them. This appears to have fallen by the wayside, as everyone realised the world would be full of unalloyed filth, such as Jizzlobber and Old Mucky's Tit Rub. Which is certainly what I called mine.

**The horse I found would have made exploration quicker, but unfortunately he handled like a sack of warm shit**

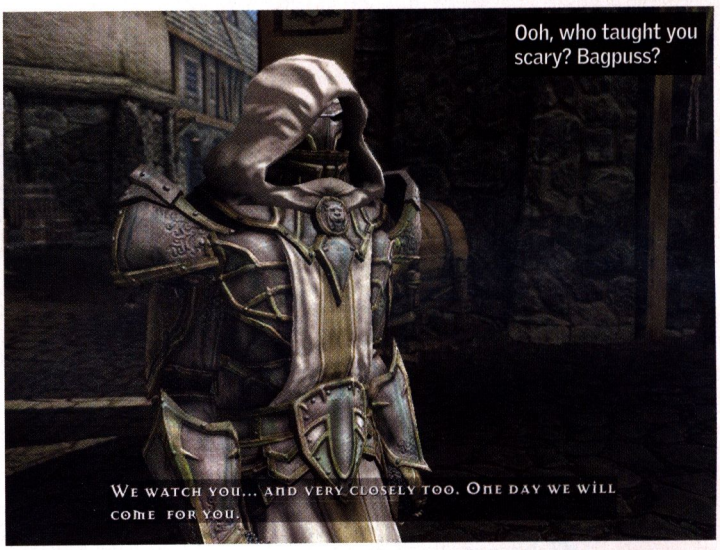

And this is the face I pull to make the ladies feel safe.

This is a freeform adventure, so despite the fast day-night cycle giving the impression of in-game urgency, you can still take a leisurely walk around the world and stop to pick a few flowers. The horse I found lying around would have made exploration quicker, but unfortunately he handled like a sack of warm shit.

### COMBINE HARVEST

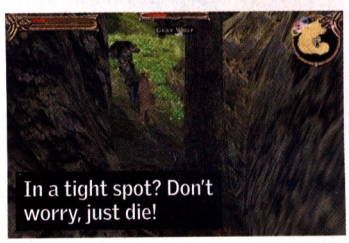
There's something interesting about *Two Worlds* – the ability to combine items, like we all did with *Diablo*'s Horadric Cube, has been expanded from a few recipes to include everything in the game world. Have you just collected 50 identical swords from the corpses of soldiers that you've killed while standing in a resurrection shrine? They're no longer a burden to be sold when you get to a town – you can combine them to create a single sword that receives a stat boost with every recombination. You can do it with spell cards too, and this certainly reduces 'Grey Loot Fatigue', which Google assures me is a phrase I just invented. Every Grom plank stops being clutter, and becomes a bonus for your massive bludgeoning plank. Does it render the more traditional trading approach redundant? That depends on your tastes, really – you can do either.


Horses: great in theory, awful in handling.



Ooh, who taught you scary? Bagpuss?


Most realistic barley field ever?


In a tight spot? Don't worry, just die!

The multiplayer aspect of *Two Worlds* enables you to roam the same map in a parallel, *Guild Wars*-esque world of hubs and instances, where teams of eight can work to unlock new hubs by carrying out your usual missions. Currently, it's an entertaining sideshow rather than a full alternative to the single-player campaign, but Reality Pump are working on bringing new features out – it's just a shame we can't really comment on them now without making everything up.

*Two Worlds* isn't a masterpiece, but it is entertaining. It's deep – the side quests massively outweigh the main game, and what you can get up to with items is nearly as interesting as what you can do in *Oblivion*. Just as with Bethesda's monster, you can lose happy hours tinkering with the way things work. Sadly, it's also pretty flawed, and the freeform approach is hindered by a world that's both underpopulated and underfeatured. It's easy to appreciate and enjoy, but difficult to love. PCZ

**PCZONE**

Graphics **Good, but demanding**
Sound **Atmospheric music**
Multiplayer **Interestingly, yes**

- ✓ Big game, big world
- ✓ Some good innovations, especially item combining
- ✓ Decent fun
- ✗ Death doesn't matter
- ✗ The main plot isn't as good as the side plots
- ✗ Shit horses

**73**

**Patch this, pretty lady**

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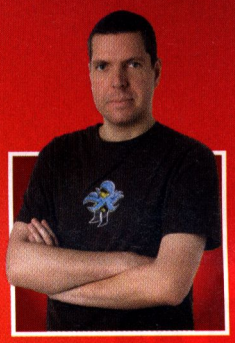
**What we said about *Medieval II: Total War*...**

"Reprising the medieval theme of *Rome*'s predecessor and packed with a myriad of new features, it's the most detailed *Total War* game to date. Sit back and enjoy all of the delightful tweaks and innovations that *Medieval II* brings to this majestic RTS series."

**91%**

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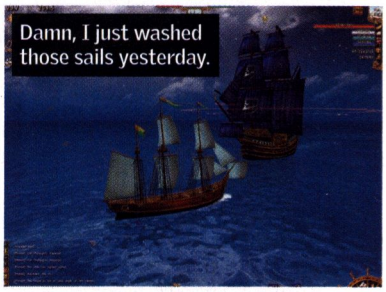
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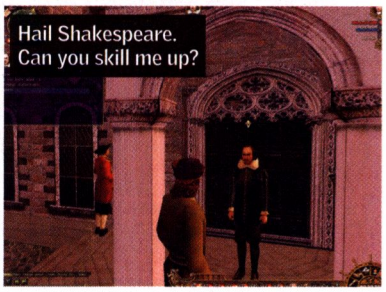
**Jamie Sefton**
**Editor**

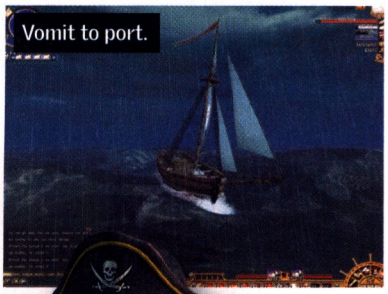
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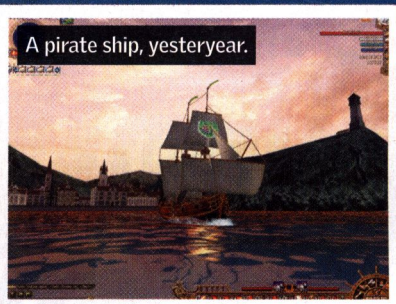
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# BOUNTY BAY ONLINE

## There are plenty of buckles on *Paul Presley*'s swash, but they don't half chafe without a spot of lotion

**DEVELOPER** Suzhou Snail Electronic Co
**PUBLISHER** Frogster Interactive Pictures AG
**WEBSITE** bbo.yusho.de/en
**ETA** September 14
**PRICE** £19.99 (+ monthly subscription fee)

**WORD OF MOUTH** from the beta testing of *Pirates Of The Burning Sea* suggests that developer Flying Lab Software is creating a fully fledged 'world' for you to sail about in, rather than just hitching the game to a single 'Yaar, me hearties' hook and be damned with the rest.

*Bounty Bay Online*? Well, it's taking much more of a 'we're a game' route. Plus it has all the trappings of a typical Far East grind-athon MMO, which never helps when it comes to the Western market.

For example, each port is much the same as any other, barring differences in architecture and NPC placement. It also has something of a cut-down *Civilization* feel to it; it's more multiplayer strategy game than online RPG. There are three trades to choose from – explorer, merchant or warrior – with a skill system that heavily favours those who spend days playing for less than a dollar in a Korean internet cafe.

### HAPPY BOAT FUN TIME

Much of *BBO*'s problem comes down to presentation. It's a Western version of an Eastern game, *Voyage Century Online*, with the free-to-play (and much abused by gold farmers) model replaced by a more community-inspiring subscription model. Only without the ability to modify the UI code, the programmers are stuck trying to force Western-language translations into areas designed for Chinese Hanzi characters. So everything looks like the gaming equivalent of a badly dubbed martial arts film – tiny text, bad 'Engrish' and not much sense. Not good when there's a far more accessible-looking alternative bearing down on the port side.

The game isn't bad per se, and there's fun to be had from the sailing mechanics and just exploring the open seas, battling pirates. But ultimately, *BBO*'s downfall is that you're always very much aware you're just playing a fancy resource/trading game with a smattering of other players online, and paying monthly for the privilege. *POTBS*, meanwhile, is promising a whole world to swashbuckle in. We just hope it lives up to its potential; otherwise we'll all have to stay in port a while longer waiting for a decent ship to raise our mugs to. PCZ



### AT A GLANCE...

Salty sailing MMO that leans heavily on moving sets of numbers from one part of the world to another (trading) or shooting lead balls at pirates.

**Minimum system requirements:** 1.2GHz processor, 128MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

**HOW IT STACKS**

| | |
|---|---|
| CIVILIZATION IV | 92% |
| EVE ONLINE | 88% |
| BOUNTY BAY ONLINE | 65% |

### PCZONE

| | |
|---|---|
| Graphics | Nice scenery and sailing effects; average apart from that |
| Sound | Catchy music, if repetitive; annoyingly constant wind |
| Multiplayer | The clue's in the title |

- ✓ Sailing is fun
- ✓ It's different, for sure
- ✗ Lousy presentation
- ✗ Very 'grind-heavy'
- ✗ Repetitive gameplay and world design
- ✗ No real long-term game mechanic

**65**
**Adrift in the ocean**

www.oxm.co.uk

XBOX 360™

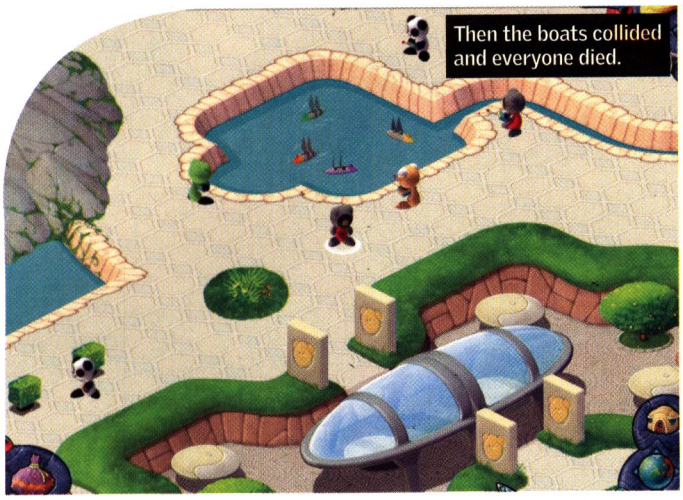
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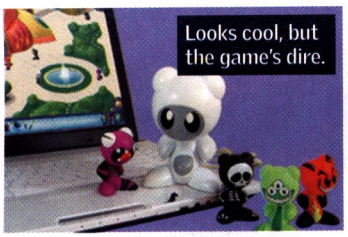


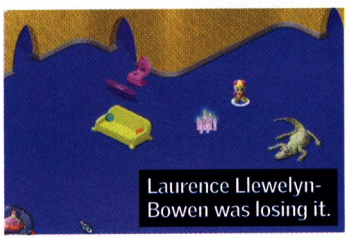

# U.B. FUNKEYS

## Where do we get these beautiful toys?

**DEVELOPER** Radica Games
**PUBLISHER** Mattel
**WEBSITE** www.ubfunkeys.com
**ETA** Out now
**PRICE** £19.95 (starter pack with two Funkeys); £5 (single pack)

**Min system req:**
800MHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card



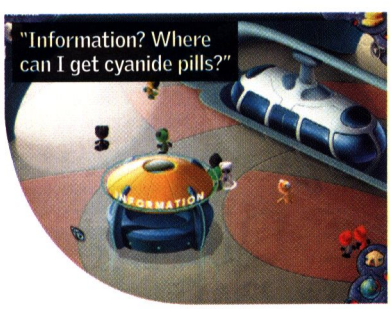




**IT'S AN AGE-OLD** adage that kids aren't stupid. In actual fact, they are stupid – some of them extremely stupid. As such, the aforementioned adage is generally one bandied about by adults whose brainpower has deteriorated to such an alarming degree that their every thought and move can be deciphered with remarkable ease by even the dumbest of children. Step forward Mattel, creators of the U.B. Funkeys range and alleged rip-off merchants!

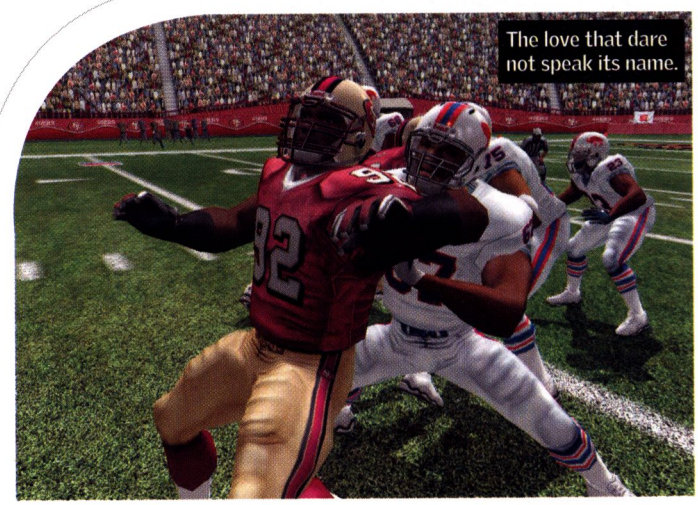
The world of the U.B. Funkeys is a bastardised creation that rips off *The Sims* and *Animal Crossing* with unerring ineptitude – its gimmick being that when you buy a fresh Funkey from the shops and stick it into your USB-connected mute-looking giant Funkey, your on-screen avatar changes and you gain access to new furniture and games. And the games! A kid playing this could be taught enough Flash programming to make better mini-games.

Even if the toys themselves look a mite cool, there's no way any child reared in the PlayStation generation would be suckered in by this. At £20 for the base unit and two piggypack Funkeys, then an additional fiver for every new friend required to unlock an ounce of extra content, this is one money-spinner you should ensure your offspring avoid.

*Will Porter*




**PCZONE 27**
U.B. Stinky

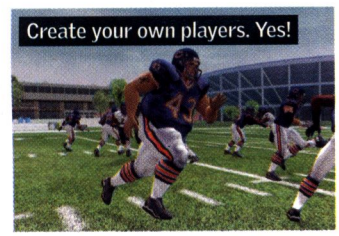



# MADDEN NFL 08

## 22. 38. 42. And two egg fried rice...

**DEVELOPER** EA Sports
**PUBLISHER** EA Sports
**WEBSITE** www.ea.com
**ETA** Out now
**PRICE** £29.99

**Min system req:**
800MHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card

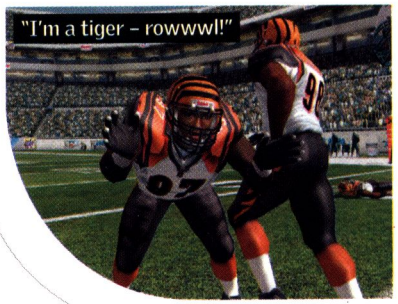



**ONE OF THE NEW** features listed on the box of *Madden NFL 08* is that it supports widescreen monitors. Gosh. What next? Speaker support? It'll be on that internet soon, and then we'll all be in trouble.

Anyway, it's business as usual for the venerable warhorse of American football games. As always, the new additions – skill icons over players' heads, practice sessions against eerie mobile-yet-legless dummies (a bit like facing an army of rainbow-coloured Davroses), a slight refinement of in-play tackles and so forth – fail to mask the general lack of progress being made with the overall gaming experience. It's all perfectly playable, true, but polish levels are down across the board and the overall art direction needs a kick in the nut sacks sharpish. Even the commentators sound like they're just going through the motions.

Perhaps the one thing the *Madden* series needs more than anything else is the NFL equivalent of a *Pro Evo Soccer* nipping at its heels to keep it competitive. Anyone with half an eye can see how the presentation levels have been slipping like a ferret on ice over the last few years. Unfortunately, the only potential challenger to EA's behemoth is currently 2K Sports' *All-Pro Football*, but since it's console-only right now, we're a bit buggered. So let's start a campaign to get it ported. You get to control a virtual OJ Simpson in it, and there aren't that many games that put you in the shoes of real-life (one-time) murder suspects. Unless Tiger Woods has flipped out by the time you read this and butchered his caddie.

*Paul Presley*




**PCZONE 73**
Fumbling for the ball

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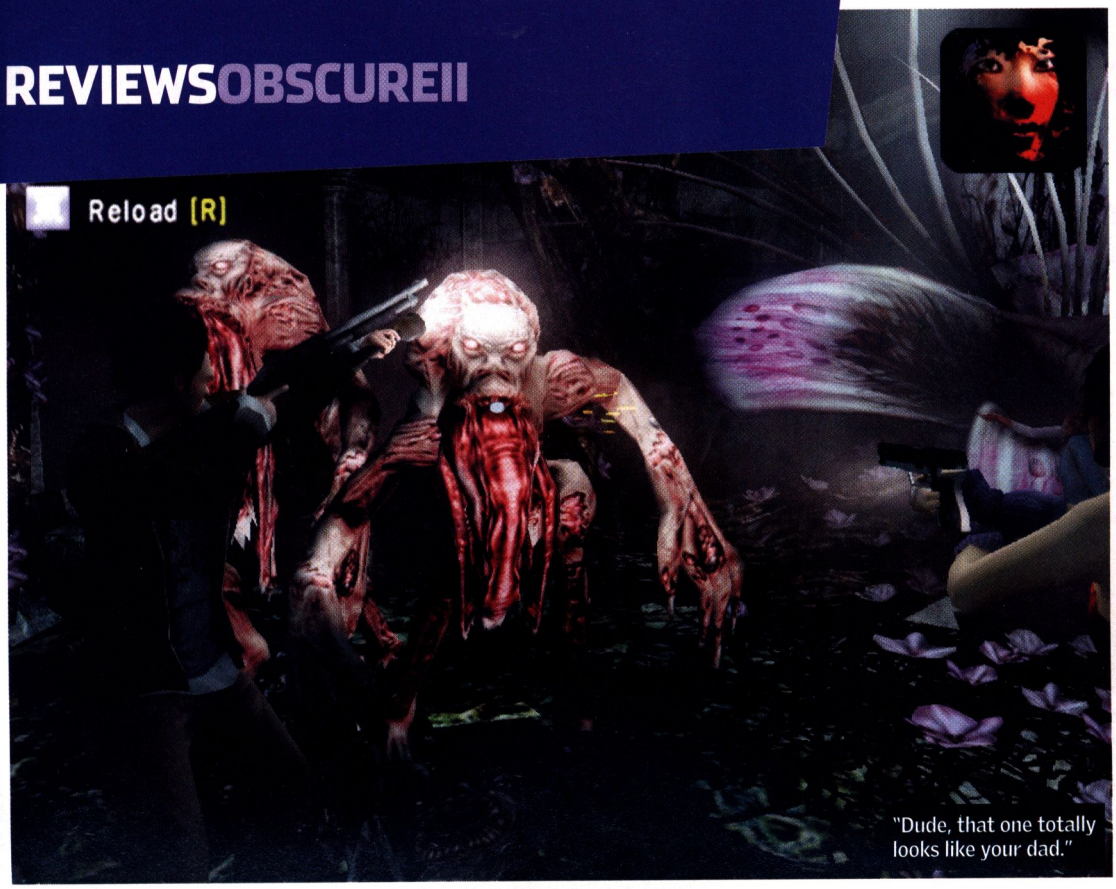
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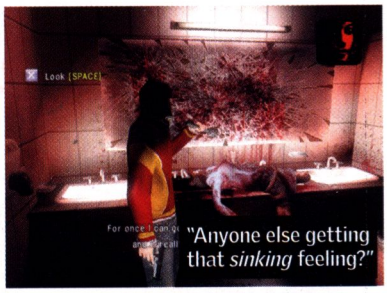
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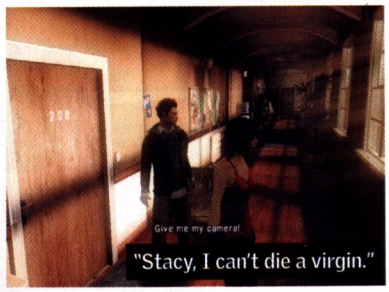
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"Dude, that one totally looks like your dad."



"Anyone else getting that *sinking* feeling?"



"Stacy, I can't die a virgin."


"Hmm. I spy a lo-res texture."

# OBSCURE II

## *Suzy Wallace* stops to smell the flowers, but gets a bouquet of death...

**DEVELOPER** Hydravision Entertainment
**PUBLISHER** Playlogic
**WEBSITE** www.playlogicinternational.com/games/?id=obscure2
**ETA** Out now
**PRICE** £29.99

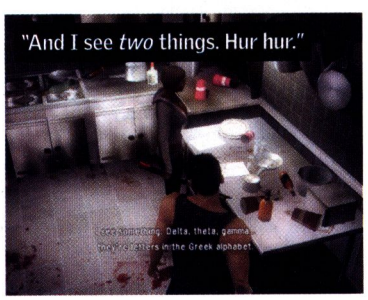
**AMERICAN TEENAGERS:** the throwers of crazy college parties, and the prime fodder of today's horror films. The original *ObsCure* was a school-based, classic take on the teen horror genre, and things have changed little for the sequel. The story begins with a bunch of kids at a party snorting a flower in order to get their next buzz. Yes, that's right, a flower. Kids today, eh? But things soon start to go wrong, and what was intended to be a good buzz ends up turning into a bloodbath.

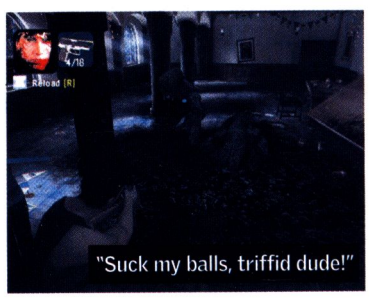
The action's pretty standard horror-genre fare, comprising console-y, lock-on combat sections mixed with a sizeable dollop of wandering around in dimly lit environments, trying to figure out what the hell's going on and waiting for the next monster to jump out and rip your face off. It's all pretty daft, but enjoyable in its own leave-your-brain-at-the-door way.

If you're the type of person who pukes in their mouth a little every time a show such as *The O.C.* comes on the telly, you'll probably want to stay clear, as the heroes of the story are a bunch of sickly-sweet, stereotypical American college kids. The drop-in/drop-out co-op play is a highlight, though, making it ideal brainless fun to play through with a mate.

*ObsCure II*'s real problem is that, while it doesn't do anything wrong exactly, it doesn't do anything that well either. It's unfailingly linear, and though the keyboard and mouse controls work surprisingly well, they're hindered by some misleading instructions on screen. Aside from the odd graphical glitch, most of the game actually looks quite passable, with many of the console-inherited lo-res textures being helpfully disguised by dim lighting. Its worst problem is the save points, which disappear after use, forcing you to replay sections of the game and killing off any tension that may have built up.

If horror films where the screams are sufficiently high-pitched to get the neighbourhood dogs howling are your kind of thing, then *ObsCure II* is easy to get into, not too taxing on the brain and just about competent enough to keep you playing for its 15-hour duration. Just remember to stay away from flowers. Flowers are bad... m'kay? PCZ


"And I see *two* things. Hur hur."



"Suck my balls, triffid dude!"

### AT A GLANCE...

Classic teen horror set in and around a college, with some trance-inducing flowers and convenient co-op play.

**Minimum system requirements:** 1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card.

**HOW IT STACKS**

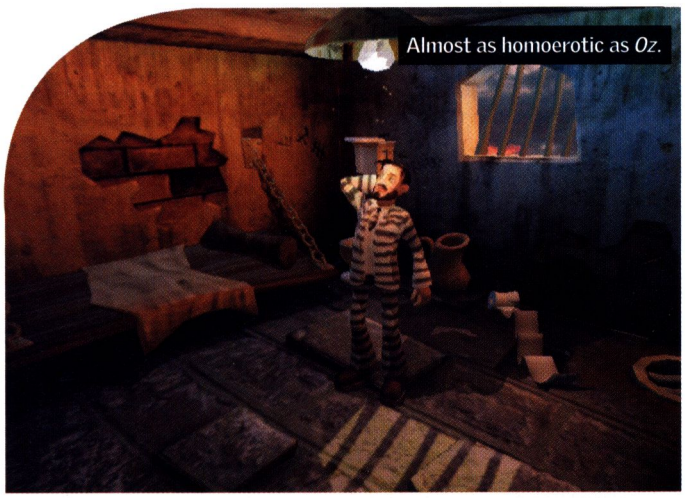
| | |
|---|---|
| OBSCURE II | 64% |
| SILENT HILL 4 | 63% |
| RESIDENT EVIL 4 | 57% |

### PCZONE

| | |
|---|---|
| Graphics | Dark and lo-res, but more than passable |
| Sound | OK sound, whiny American voice-overs |
| Multiplayer | Two player co-op |

- ✓ Accessible co-op play
- ✓ Silly but enjoyable
- ✓ Some decent lighting effects
- ✗ Annoying save points kill tension
- ✗ Combat's a bit clunky
- ✗ Very linear

**64**
**Flower power**

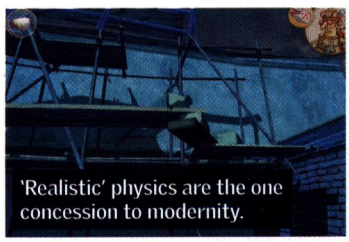

Almost as homoerotic as *Oz*.

# EVIL DAYS OF LUCKLESS JOHN

## 'Feckless' might have been more apt

**DEVELOPER** Centauri
**PUBLISHER** Playlogic
**WEBSITE** www.evildaysof lucklessjohn.com
**ETA** Out now
**PRICE** £19.99

**Min system req:**
1.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card.


'Realistic' physics are the one concession to modernity.

**IF YOU'RE DESPERATE** for an adventure game in these relatively adventure-light times, then *Evil Days Of Luckless John* may appeal to you. It's not particularly terrible. On the other hand, it *is* mediocre, average, replete with all of the trappings of the typical mid-'90s adventure title and a reminder of why the genre was dying for so long.

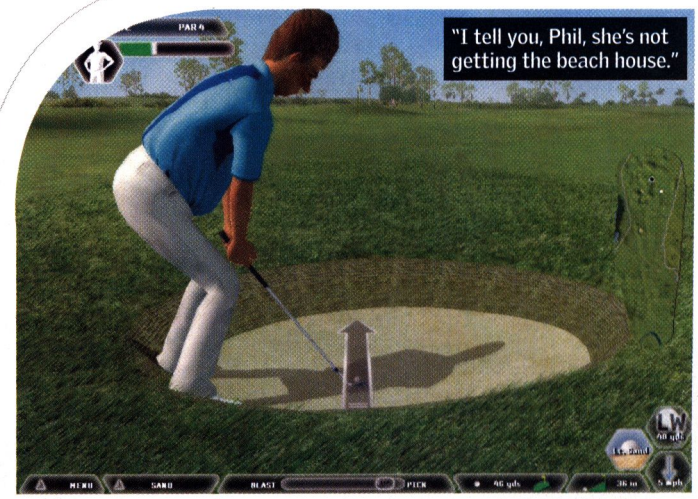
The game's typically irreverent protagonist goes by the disturbingly prime-ministerial name of Johnny Majer. He's unlucky and that's funny. The cast is typically oddball. The environments are typically cartoony and basic. There's the typical series of mini-games to break up the at times (typically) brain-curdlingly illogical puzzles. The mini-games involve thrills such as 'wrestle with the controls and get shot' and the much vaunted 'wild tractor ride', which is about as exciting as it sounds. If you played *Grim Fandango* in the seamy days of 1998, you might wonder why after almost a decade, not even the shoddy control system has changed.

The main draw of an adventure game, apart from the challenging and rewarding puzzles that this particular one lacks, is entertaining dialogue. Unfortunately for Johnny Majer, he seems to have left his in his other jockstrap, along with a basic grasp of the English language. With Sam & Max doing their best to keep an ailing genre alive, it's awful to watch games like this sneak into its hospital room and try to smother it with a pillow.

*Stephen Blythe*


The 'wrestling with the controls and dying' mini-game.

**PCZONE 42**
**A bit crap ten years ago**


"I tell you, Phil, she's not getting the beach house."

# TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 08

## As regular as bloody Christmas

**DEVELOPER** EA Sports
**PUBLISHER** EA
**WEBSITE** www.easports.com/tigerwoods08
**ETA** Out now
**PRICE** £29.99

**Min system req:**
1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.


Who needs corneas anyway?

**HERE'S WHAT PISSES** me off. The 360 version of this very title enables you to plug in your 'Xbox Live Vision' camera and project your digital clone into the game. It's a good feature. It's really fun to do, and your virtual impersonator keeps your interest while you play, acting like a tiny hypnotist, appealing to your age-old dreams of actually being in a game.

We don't get that. Oh no. Instead, we get page after page of sliders, which produce the kind of freak pictured here (we're thinking a young Clinton who let himself go, then got stung by lots of bees). It's like EA have never heard of webcams, and can't imagine that anyone would have 'photos' of themselves on their inflexible, powerless home computer machines. 'Photo Game Face' was the most entertaining, most innovative thing about the 360 version. For EA to not transfer something they'd already put the effort into developing is like flicking us all on the nutbag. It pisses me off.

Of course, having said that, this is still a solid PC golfing game, even if it lacks the accessibility and some of the game modes and features of the 360 version. It's still enjoyable enough to play, even if generations of inbred reinvention may have left it feeling anaemic and feeble. It's fine. I just find it impossible to believe that if you love golf games, you don't already own one that's so substantially similar to this one as to render it utterly, shabbily redundant.

*Jon Blyth*


"I got wood! Hur hur."

**PCZONE 50**
**Albadross**

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

# indiezone

PCZONE ON THE DVD

***Martin Korda*** **dives into the indie bag and comes out clutching some gems**

# GLOBAL CONFLICTS: PALESTINE

**DEVELOPER** Serious Games
**WEBSITE** www.globalconflicts.eu
**PRICE** €20 (£14)

INDIEZONE GAME OF THE MONTH

**IT SEEMS THAT** the Palestinian/Israeli situation has captured the imagination of indie game developers of late. Following last month's excellent strategy game *Peacemaker* is this intelligently crafted piece of edutainment, which casts you as a reporter in the region, collecting quotes for your stories from various sources.

You must choose whether to take the side of the Israelis or the Palestinians (or remain impartial) by selecting who to interview and which questions to ask. The paper that you choose to represent (Palestinian, Israeli or European) also affects the slant of your articles.

But here's the catch. People will only talk to you if they trust you. So while agreeing with everything a person says will gain you favour with the faction they represent, you also stand to lose the trust of the opposite side.

*Global Conflicts: Palestine* is a superb piece of edutainment with a moral centre that presents all sides of the Palestinian/Israeli debate. Both fun and edifying, it offers a level of depth and intelligence that's rare in the indie scene, and while the missions may prove to be somewhat repetitive, the novel gameplay and the political content are worthy of huge commendation.

PCZONE 80

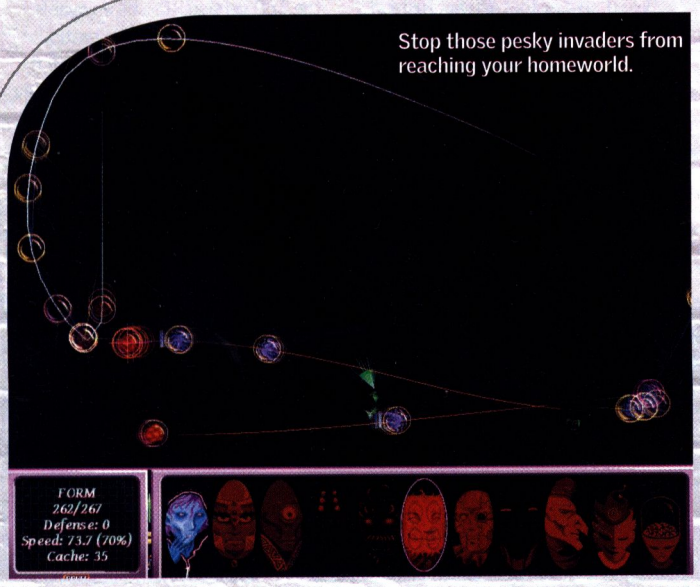



Can you remain impartial?

Tactfulness = trust.

# IMMORTAL DEFENSE

**DEVELOPER** RPGCreations **WEBSITE** studioeres.com **PRICE** $22.95 (£12)

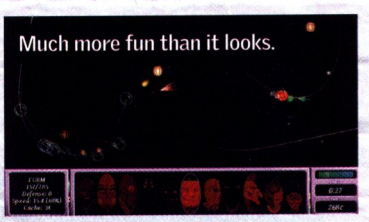



Stop those pesky invaders from reaching your homeworld.

**IMMORTAL DEFENSE IS** a tower-defence game with a difference. While it looks about as graphically accomplished as a Word document, the frenetic yet tactical gameplay – with an excellent plot and a wealth of background information – proves more than enough to warrant your attention.

Enemies travel towards your homeworld via linear, looping pathways (you're a celestial being that intercepts invaders while they're still in hyperspace). As well as strategically placing a collection of varied turrets along these pathways, you can also directly intervene in each level by shooting at the enemies with your mouse pointer.

There are countless hours of tower-ific entertainment to be had here, and a superbly imagined universe and plot to enjoy. Clearly, RPGCreations has lavished *Immortal Defense* with lashings of love, and after you've played it for a few minutes, you'll doubtless be doing the same.



Much more fun than it looks.

PCZONE 72

# VIGIL: BLOOD BITTERNESS

**DEVELOPER** Freegamer **WEBSITE** www.freegamer.net **PRICE** $9.95 (£5)

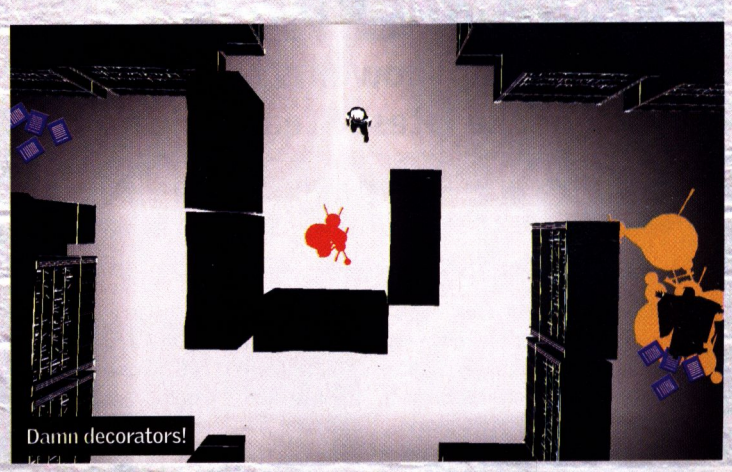
**THERE ARE TWO** ways of looking at *Vigil: Blood Bitterness*. The first is that it's a triumph of bold originality over mainstream conformism. The second is that it's a pretentious attempt to mask basic gameplay with ostentatious presentation and nonsensical ramblings.

One thing's for sure: this is the oddest game ever to feature in Indie Zone. You play Dehon, a being who must eliminate evil from the world. What follows is a trawl through black-and-white levels in an attempt to work out what you're meant to be doing – as frustrating as it is intriguing – while watching cryptic cut-scenes and deciphering clues.

It's great to see the Freegamer folks being so original, but the lack of player guidance is a real hindrance, while the puzzles often degenerate into click-fests as you attempt to find the one item/area in a room you can interact with. Puzzles are also fairly simplistic – though had they been any harder, the game would have been unplayable.

*Blood Bitterness* won't be everyone's cup of tea, but if you're into the surreal, love your puzzles or you're simply sick of formulaic puzzle/adventure games, this could just be the perfect tonic for you.

PCZONE 75




# URBAN LEGEND

**DEV** Electronic Entertainments Studio **WEB** euthanize-today.com **PRICE** $19.95 (£10)







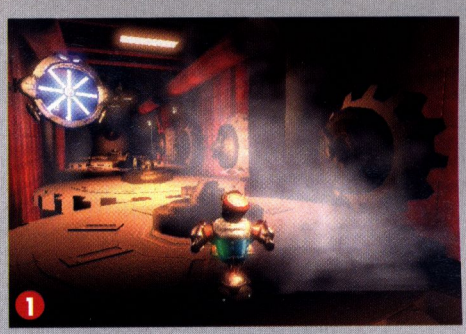
**URBAN LEGEND PROMISES** much, but unfortunately fails to deliver on that promise. From the conspiracy-fuelled, futuristic plot centring on the creation of new food sources to the clumsy cursor-controlled movement interface, this watered-down *X-COM* clone is riddled with shortcomings that belie its otherwise entertaining premise and challenging turn-based strategy gameplay.

Using clever tactics and sidekicks (who are about as intelligent as a brain-damaged Rottweiler), you must attempt to outmanoeuvre your enemies and blast them into oblivion with a collection of futuristic weapons. It's certainly a violent romp, but the hit-and-miss humour and the ropy visuals ensure that *Urban Legend* is never quite as funny and brutal as it thinks it is.

If the text had been written properly, the AI sharpened and the control interface tweaked, this game could have been a real winner. As it is, it's entertaining in bursts, but hardly an essential buy.

PCZONE 61

## PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES




**ROBOBLITZ**
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed issue 177
This stunning third-person action puzzler about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest-scoring Indie Zone game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to Unreal Engine 3, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.




**NAKED WAR**
www.zee-3.com | Reviewed issue 177
A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers must kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.




**MORNING'S WRATH**
www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed issue 163
A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.




**NEW STAR SOCCER 3**
www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed issue 164
This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensible Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie-gaming footy experience available.




**MR ROBOT**
www.moonpod.com | Reviewed issue 181
Like an isometric *RoboBlitz* with zany RPG-style combat. You play a robot who must bring a malfunctioning starship back online. Packed with puzzles, great characters and humour.

# BUDGET

**Who says steam power is outdated? We look at the latest Steam releases...**

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

## COMPANY OF HEROES

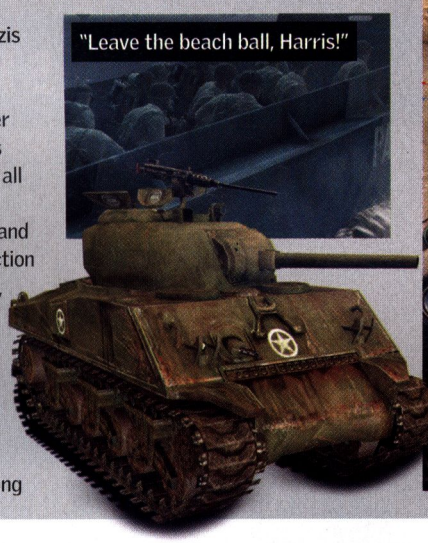
**PUBLISHER** Steam **WEBSITE** www.steampowered.com **PRICE** $29.95 (£15)

PCZONE 92

**IF THERE'S ONE** type of game that's guaranteed to make our eyes glaze over and possibly even induce sleep on the spot at the mere mention of it, it has to be that most popular of all PC genres, the WWII RTS. There are so many dull, repetitive titles in this category... so Relic's take on the genre was like a breath of fresh air, making killing Nazis from a top-down view an enjoyable pastime again.

Its mixture of thrilling single-player campaign and excellent multiplayer is a brilliant combination, but that's not all Relic had to offer. Not by a long shot. This game has destructible buildings and scenery, a leaning towards tactical action (especially flanking and taking cover), excellent tech trees, a reliance on capturing territory that encourages conflict and graphics so gorgeously rendered that you can zoom right in and witness limbs being separated from bodies. Whatever floats your boat. In fact, we'd go as far as declaring that its beautifully balanced gameplay is every bit as exciting as playing a decent WWII FPS. Haven't got yourself a copy yet? Then hop to it, soldier!

*Suzy Wallace*










## TITAN QUEST

**PUBLISHER** Steam **WEBSITE** www.steampowered.com **PRICE** $19.95 (£10)

PCZONE 80

**DID YOU KNOW** that repeated playing of *Titan Quest* creates a beat not too dissimilar to that of the latest German techno track? Yes, that 150bpm can be achieved by booting up the game and heading to an especially packed area, where your frantic clicking on enemies will accurately recreate the atmosphere found in most clubs in Europe.

Headbanging aside, though, *Titan Quest* is basically Iron Lore's modern-day take on *Diablo*. Starting off in ancient Greece, you'll also make your way through Egypt and China, battling various monsters drawn from local mythology. Just think of it as the early days of pest control.

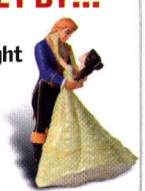
There's tons to do, with over 40 hours of play and masses of side quests, and the lush graphics, in-depth skill mastery and polished gameplay are a joy for those who like their RPGs click-heavy. As the best of the recent glut of action RPGs, it's well worth a look if you're patiently awaiting the release of *Diablo 3*. What's more, the expansion *Immortal Throne* is yours for the same price, too. Bonus!

*Suzy Wallace*






### THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...



**Jamie being bought things due to getting married:**
**Saving: Lots!**



**Will finding 40p in his drawer:**
**Saving: 40p**



**Steve getting change from a tenner when he'd only used a fiver:**
**Saving: £5**

# ID SUPER PACK

**PUBLISHER** Steam **WEBSITE** www.steampowered.com **PRICE** $69.95 (£35)

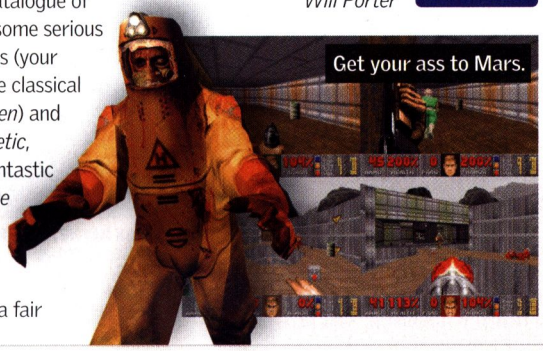
**SHOULD YOU PAY** £35 for every game id have ever done ever? We guess it depends on just how nostalgic you're feeling – even the most fervent of fanboys would have to admit that id's no-nonsense approach to the science of shootery isn't one that's guaranteed to age like a fine wine.

This said, for those who haven't played and replayed the back catalogue of Texas's finest, there are some serious gems in here. The classics (your *Dooms*, your *Quakes*), the classical classics (*Commander Keen*) and the sadly forgotten (*Heretic*, *Hexen* and the utterly fantastic *Quake* expansion *Scourge Of Armagon*). There's clearly some almighty goodness in this pack, even if we'd wager that a fair chunk of the oldies would struggle to grab the attention of a modern gamer for their entirety. For the completist and the enthusiast, though, having these lolling in your Steam account certainly beats climbing into the loft and blowing the dust off rotting cardboard. Here's lookin' at you, id...

*Will Porter*

PCZONE 78







# SIN EPISODES: EMERGENCE

**PUBLISHER** Steam **WEBSITE** www.steampowered.com **PRICE** $14.95 (£7.50)

**GAMES CAN NO** longer rely exclusively on tits, arse and grunt extermination to win our attention: this has become *SiN*'s dying message to the world. Which is rather sad, really, as it means that people don't make stupid, gory, non-ironic, no-brain shooters any more – not like they used to. Just look at this game – it lets you see brain chunks! It's like the '90s never went away!

We make no secret of the fact that we loved *Emergence*, and continue to revel in its daft Arena killathon mode. Mean, grumpy people might perhaps point out that the level design is patchy, the graphics merely OK-ish and the package but a pale shadow of what Ritual were after – but in our opinion, for silly flaming-barrel shenanigans, it's a really great laugh. As a shallow game for similarly shallow people, there's no better substitute.

*Will Porter*

PCZONE 80



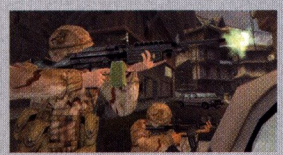






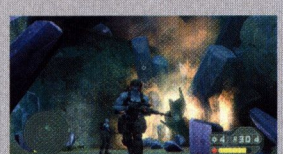

## And the rest...

**Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)**



**FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS**
**$9.95 (£5), STEAM**
A modified version of the US Army recruitment tool. If the UK army opted for the same, our boys would be standing around waiting for supplies of gravity guns. Here the troops just swear a lot while taking cover behind last-gen console graphics.

PCZONE 69



**ROGUE TROOPER**
**£9.99, MASTERTRONIC**
Another *2000 AD* character gets digitalised. The tutorial's patronising, but the action – with some diverse weaponry and decent dialogue – is enjoyable. If you can get over the fact that it looks like one of the Blue Man Group has gone militant.

PCZONE 71



**HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V**
**£9.99, MASTERTRONIC**
The game whose acronym sounds like a priest humming retains its predecessors' addictiveness. Explore, collect resources, build up cities, armies and heroes, and have it out in a turn-based fashion, all in a vibrant (some might say camp) 3D world.

PCZONE 75

## PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



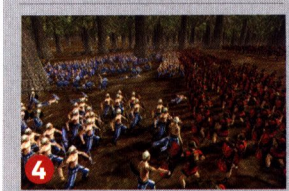
**HALF-LIFE 2**
**$19.95 (£10), STEAM**
Do we really need to explain why you need to sample Gordon's physics-based outing? For a tenner? OK, then – it's PC gaming at its finest. Happy now?



**FAR CRY**
**£9.99, MASTERTRONIC**
Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity-gun shooter of recent years, anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific AI.



**THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND**
**£4.99, MASTERTRONIC**
Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the most wallet-friendly goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.

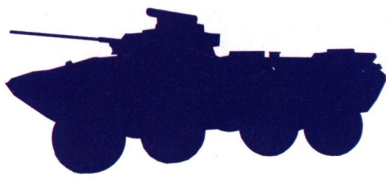


**ROME: TOTAL WAR**
**£9.99, GSP WHITE LABEL**
Long-term chart-topper *Rome: TW*'s glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



**PSYCHONAUTS**
**$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM**
Brilliant humour, wonderfully creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this quirky title into the stratosphere of platformers.

# BUYER'S GUIDE



**The bestest games your money can buy...**

## PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'R'

1. REDSHIFT (ISSUE 15)
2. ROME: TOTAL WAR (ISSUE 148)
3. RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS (ISSUE 168)
4. RISE OF NATIONS (ISSUE 129)
5. RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY (ISSUE 131)

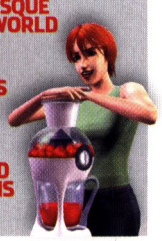


## PCZONE TOP 5 MOST ORIGINAL GAME SETTINGS

1. CAMP FOR THE PSYCHICALLY GIFTED (PSYCHONAUTS – ISSUE 156)
2. FANTASY/STEAMPUNK/ LEONARDO DA VINCI (RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS – ISSUE 168)
3. POST-APOCALYPTIC WASTELAND (FALLOUT SERIES – ISSUE 61)
4. ALTERNATE MYTHICAL ORIENTAL WORLD (JADE EMPIRE – ISSUE 179)
5. UNDERWATER ANTI-UTOPIAN CITY (BIOSHOCK – ISSUE 185)

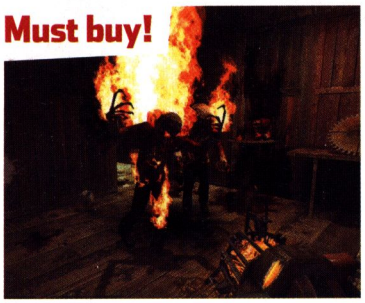
## PCZONE TOP 5 MOST OVER-USED GAME SETTINGS

1. WORLD WAR II
2. OUTER SPACE
3. TOLKIEN-ESQUE FANTASY WORLD
4. STAR WARS UNIVERSE
5. THE WORLD OF THE SIMS



## Shooters

### Must buy!



**HALF-LIFE 2**
**PCZ Issue: 148 – 97%**
Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to deliver. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.




**BIOSHOCK**
**PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%**
The spiritual sequel to *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat makes this an unmissable experience.




**BATTLEFIELD 2**
**PCZ Issue: 157 – 94%**
If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the ability to zap people with medic shock pads.




**FAR CRY**
**PCZ Issue: 140 – 93%**
In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.




**HL2: EPISODE ONE**
**PCZ Issue: 170 – 91%**
Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2: Ep. One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



**CALL OF DUTY 2**
**PCZ Issue: 162 – 91%**
Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



**F.E.A.R.**
**PCZ Issue: 160 – 90%**
With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Rentaghost* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.

## Strategy

### Must buy!



**COMPANY OF HEROES**
**PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%**
The fact that *Company Of Heroes* hails from that most over-populated of genres – the WWII RTS – yet is still number one, is testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good.



**CIVILIZATION IV**
**PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%**
A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.



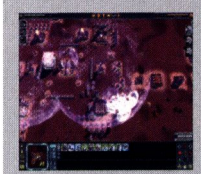
**MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**
**PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%**
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Now complemented by the excellent *Kingdoms* expansion.



**RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS**
**PCZ Issue: 168 – 91%**
Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



**LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH**
**PCZ Issue: 149 – 91%**
Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



**SUPREME COMMANDER**
**PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%**
Massive battles and armies composed of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most unique RTS titles around? Check, check and check.



**C&C3: TIBERIUM WARS**
**PCZ Issue: 180 – 86%**
A modern-day rehash of the old-school *Command & Conquer* formula we all know and love, but with polished visuals, the triumphant return of the FMV and an excellent new faction. A play is most certainly in order.

## Action/Adventure

### Must buy!



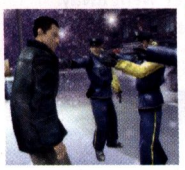
**MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**
**PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%**
The chosen poison for certain *PCZ* staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



**GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS**
**PCZ Issue: 155 – 92%**
To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this – a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious – *San Andreas* is the pinnacle of gaming achievement.




**SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY**
**PCZ Issue 154 – 91%**
A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercs multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



**FAHRENHEIT**
**PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%**
Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.




**PSYCHONAUTS**
**PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%**
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.




**BEYOND GOOD & EVIL**
**PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%**
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.




**PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES**
**PCZ Issue: 164 –86%**
The spiritless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

# MMOs

Must buy!



### WORLD OF WARCRAFT
**PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%**
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



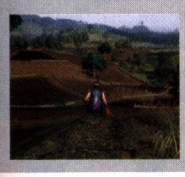
### EVERQUEST II
**PCZ Issue: 150 – 95%**
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



### GUILD WARS
**PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%**
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



### EVE ONLINE
**PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%**
*Elite* online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy – it's up to you.



### LOTR ONLINE
**PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%**
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...

# Simulation

BUDGET



### X3: REUNION
**PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%**
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well too.



### IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
**PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%**
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



### MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
**PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%**
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.

BUDGET



### FREELANCER
**PCZ Issue: 128 – 84%**
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



### SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
**PCZ Issue: 181 – 82%**
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedos, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship sinker.

# Driving/Racing

Must buy!



### GTR2
**PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%**
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



### GT LEGENDS
**PCZ Issue: 161 – 92%**
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



### LIVE FOR SPEED
**PCZ Issue: 158 – 90%**
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



### COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
**PCZ Issue: 183 – 88%**
The rallying legend returns and this time he's joined by a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC so far.



### NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
**PCZ Issue: 163 – 88%**
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.

# God games

BUDGET



### THE MOVIES
**PCZ Issue: 162 – 95%**
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



### BLACK & WHITE 2
**PCZ Issue: 161 – 93%**
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



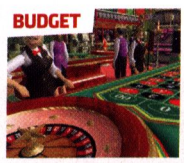
### GARRY'S MOD
**PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%**
While it might not strictly be a god game, *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jpegs. Try it out and see for yourself.

BUDGET



### EVIL GENIUS
**PCZ Issue: 147 – 84%**
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.

BUDGET



### VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG
**PCZ Issue: 135 – 84%**
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

# Sport

Must buy!



### FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
**PCZ Issue: 175 – 90%**
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



### PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
**PCZ Issue: 175 – 88%**
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* – just.



### TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
**PCZ Issue: 161 – 85%**
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



### FIFA 07
**PCZ Issue: 174 – 84%**
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. *PES*-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



### NHL 06
**PCZ Issue: 160 – 84%**
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.

# Role-playing games

Must buy!



### THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
**PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%**
*Oblivion*'s sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.

BUDGET



### KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
**PCZ Issue: 137 – 94%**
*KOTOR* is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.

BUDGET



### THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
**PCZ Issue: 116 – 94%**
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played – the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.

BUDGET



### DEUS EX
**PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%**
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



### NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
**PCZ Issue: 176 – 86%**
An identical twin to *NWN* but using modern technology, *NWN2* has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

# INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

## September

| | |
|---|---|
| SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER | CODEMASTERS |
| SPEEDBALL 2 | FROGSTER INTERACTIVE |
| STRANGLEHOLD | MIDWAY |
| WORLD IN CONFLICT | VIVENDI GAMES |

## October

| | |
|---|---|
| BLACKSITE | MIDWAY |
| CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE | ACTIVISION |
| CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO | CODEMASTERS |
| FLATOUT: ULTIMATE CARNAGE | EMPIRE |
| HALF-LIFE 2/TEAM FORTRESS 2/PORTAL | VALVE |
| NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER | ATARI |
| PAINKILLER: OVERDOSE | DREAMCATCHER |
| PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 8 | KONAMI |
| SAM & MAX: SEASON 2 | TELLTALE GAMES |
| THE WITCHER | ATARI |
| TIMESHIFT | VIVENDI GAMES |
| UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT | SEGA |

## November

| | |
|---|---|
| ASSASSIN'S CREED | UBISOFT |
| BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY | UBISOFT |
| COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS | THQ |
| CRYSIS | EA |
| EMPIRE EARTH III | VIVENDI GAMES |
| F.E.A.R. PERSEUS MANDATE | VIVENDI GAMES |
| HELLGATE: LONDON | EA |
| KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN | EIDOS |
| NEED FOR SPEED: PRO STREET | EA |
| PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE: AMBITION OF THE ILLUMINUS | SEGA |
| SIMCITY SOCIETIES | EA |
| SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION | UBISOFT |
| SUPREME COMMANDER: FORGED ALLIANCE | THQ |
| UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3 | MIDWAY |



# EMPIRE TOTAL WAR

## ALL THE SHOTS, ALL THE INFO!

**PLUS!**

Medal of Honour Airborne and Stranglehold reviewed, hot info on World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King, Pirates of the Burning Sea and Rage, how games are killing us, and the sinister truth behind Stalker...

**ISSUE 179 ON SALE NOW!**

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On our huge double-sided DVD, plus mods, movies and more!

# PC GAMER®

**BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING PC GAMES MAGAZINE**

# THE ORANGE BOX ISSUE

**ISSUE 180 ON SALE SEPTEMBER 27**

## EXCLUSIVE REVIEWS

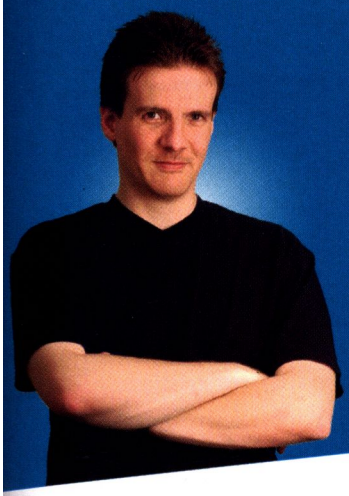
**HALF-LIFE 2 EPISODE TWO**
Gordon's back!

**TEAM FORTRESS 2**
Multiplayer revolution!

**PORTAL**
Hilarious mind-bending madness!

## PLUS: THE LEIPZIG GAMES SHOW!

Mafia 2 › Operation Flashpoint 2 › Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway › Crysis › Far Cry 2 › Fallout 3 › Borderlands › Timeshift › Starcraft 2 › UT3 › And more...



PCZONE

# HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

## Viva beige

**I WAS IN A CITROEN** showroom the other day, trying to decide which of the tiny French shopping carts was least likely to become origami when driven over by some dizzy princess in her cheating husband's Range Rover. And then I noticed how many of the cars were white.

White always used to be the most unfashionable car colour imaginable. For a start, it's a bugger to keep clean in a country legendary for mud, mist and rain, and it's the hue of choice for plumbers and riot vans. It looks cheap.

I was then informed that white is actually fashionable again, thanks to the success of all-white products such as the iPod, Wii and Eminem. And I found myself wondering, will 1970s computer brown ever make a return?

A look around my office reveals that every PC and workstation is black, complete with black keyboards, ebony mice, charcoal speakers and the odd silver monitor bezel perched on a soot-coloured stand. It's like the aftermath of a major fire.

So I went for a rummage around my loft and fished out the oldest mouse I could find, complete with two buttons, no scroll wheel and this weird D-type connector called a 'serial'. And you know what? It looked rather retro and different. Fashionable. I reckon within a few years, we'll all be buying brown cases and our peripherals in special-needs beige again.

I wonder if I should bring back my 1970s hair?

Wandy

**Phil Wand, hardware editor**

# POINT BREAK

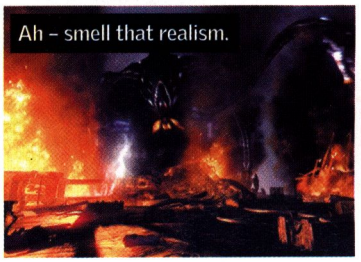
## Rumour gets about that you need a new video card to enjoy the forthcoming DirectX 10.1 update

**EARLIER THIS SUMMER,** Microsoft announced that DirectX would be 'updated' to version 10.1. They explained we'd all need Service Pack 1 on Vista to make sure it worked, and a replacement graphics card, since no current Radeon or GeForce supports the new features.

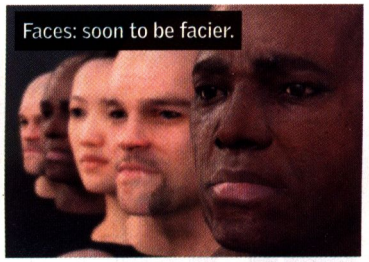
Wait – what? It seemed hard to believe that Microsoft – hardly strangers to the concept of backwards-compatibility – would render redundant the high-end hardware in thousands of computers all around the globe. More likely, surely, that the 10.1 shift introduces a number of features that no current card can handle, meaning you simply won't enjoy be able to see them.

And so it has proven. In a statement designed to shut down the rumour mill, Microsoft's Sam Glassenberg said, "DirectX version 10.1 fully supports DirectX 10 hardware. No hardware support is being removed." And yes, while you'll need a new card to enjoy those features specific to the update, Microsoft also stressed that it's extremely unlikely that any developer will create a game that demands 10.1 hardware, for the simple reason that there'd be no point in doing so. "It is only a minor update," assured Glassenberg.

So panic not. Cancel those eBay auctions now. www.microsoft.com/directx



Ah – smell that realism.

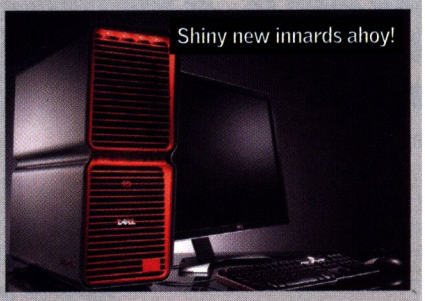


Faces: soon to be facier.

## XPS REDRESS

DELL™

### Dell offer XPS 700 owners Core 2 upgrades for nowt



Shiny new innards ahoy!

**THOSE OF YOU** who bought one of Dell's flagship gaming rigs last year may recall the promise of an upgrade to Core 2 hardware when the nForce 680 became available. Well, the time has come.

XPS 700 owners who purchased their machine before July this year can now visit the programme's website and claim what's due to them. That means a new Core 2 motherboard including on-site installation, plus an option to purchase a QX6700 chip at 25 per cent off the retail price. Don't hang about, though, because the programme ends next month. By the by, if you're an XPS 710 owner, you can get the same upgrade gear, but for a fixed fee. www.xpsupgradeprogramdell.com

## NEWS ROUND-UP

You can look forward to seeing NVIDIA's new top dog in the month before Christmas. The G92-based card is reckoned to be faster and yet quieter than any of its predecessors, though nobody knows if it'll actually make the DirectX 10 games playable. The consensus is it'll be called the GeForce 9800, like the famous old Radeon. www.nvidia.com

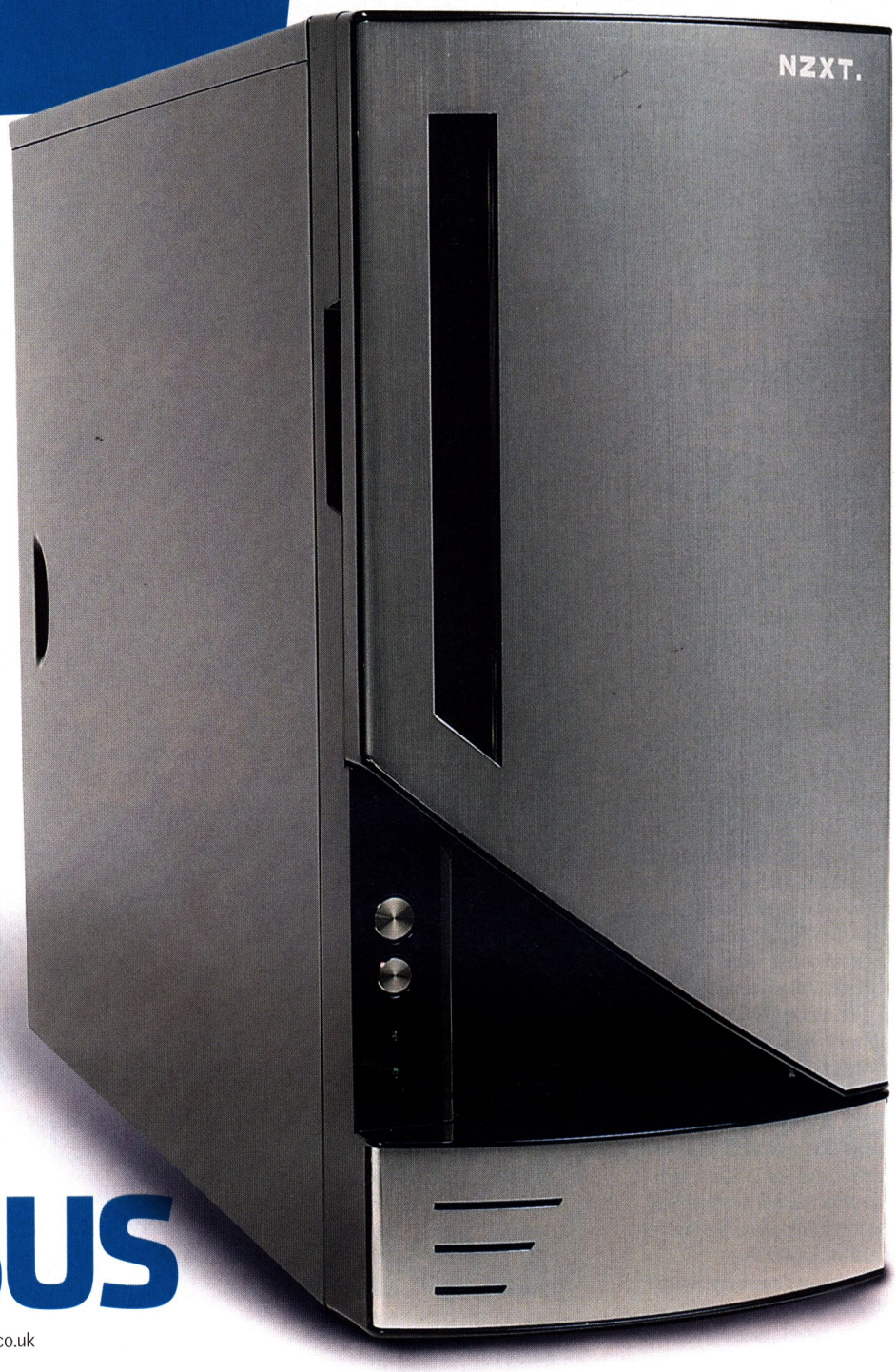
Holy rubber goods – if it isn't 25 years since the first CDs starting rolling off production lines! Those of us who ventured down to the shops that day went home again with a certain Dire Straits album, fascinated that we were holding something that was not only impossible to break or scratch, but would last forever. How stupid we all were. www.philips.com

## WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS



BY JON BLYTH

**Glassenberg:** A glorious – if slightly misspelt – ice sculpture of roly-poly actress and comedienne Bella Emberg. Donated to her home town of Brighton, where it melted on the beach. **XPS700:** One of the least convincing smileys, intended to depict a disgusted man spitting egg vermicelli back into the skillet because the twin hobs weren't on. **Fusion Hydra:** A seven-headed sea creature, each head of which enjoys a different ethnic food. An impossible dinner date, and an even less considerate lover. **Titanium Cruzer:** The least remembered blaxploitation film, in which a robot in an Afro wig utterly fails to hustle some turkeys. **Seagate Barracuda:** The malevolent fish who guards the entrance to the ocean, and will only grant passage to those who answer his riddles, or give him a wee kiss.




## MAIN SPECS

- NZXT Hush Silent case
- 500W Thermaltake PSU
- ASUS P5K P35 motherboard
- Intel Core 2 Duo E6550 (overclocked to 3.0GHz)
- GeIL PC2-6400 CAS-4 memory
- GeForce 8800 GTS 320MB
- Samsung SATA 20x DVD writer
- 320GB Seagate Barracuda
- Windows Vista Home Premium
- Chillblast cable management
- Lifetime phone support
- Two-year collect-and-return warranty

# FUSION COLOSSUS

**PRICE** £699 **MANUFACTURER** Chillblast **WEBSITE** chillblast.co.uk

**YOU CAN TELL you're one of those sad, slightly maladjusted kinds of nerd when friends email you links to Jessica Biel playing volleyball on the beach and, rather than stare longingly at a physique that causes normal people to stop breathing, you notice a Google ad for Core 2 Extreme chips at £100 under RRP and exclaim, "Wow."**

Start, run, calc. You begin doing the sums, ignoring those steely buns and wondering if it's possible to configure a dream PC – the one where Windows takes four seconds to load, applications jerk open the instant you double-click them and every game turns into a cinematic fairytale instead of a lurching, disjointed montage of polygons.

Once you've filled your basket, placed the order and the boxes have arrived – at least four or five days later than you were expecting them, naturally – it doesn't take too long for you to realise that not only have you left out the operating system and at least two important cables, but the whole idea of doing it yourself is a gigantic pain in the arse. And that you're now poor.

## BLAST OFF

However, for little more than the RRP of a Core 2 Extreme, and with absolutely no bother at all, you can have your very own Fusion Colossus instead. It's the result of a collaboration between *PC ZONE* and Chillblast, with us wanting to create something we could review that would be pretty much half the price of the Fusion Hydra (issue 181, 91%), but just as potent in terms of games.

Here it is, then, complete with a two-year warranty and the peace of mind that's missing from any DIY rig. But what about the satisfaction you get from building it all yourself, you ask? Well, that comes from knowing you've saved yourself a colossal amount of money. Hence the name.

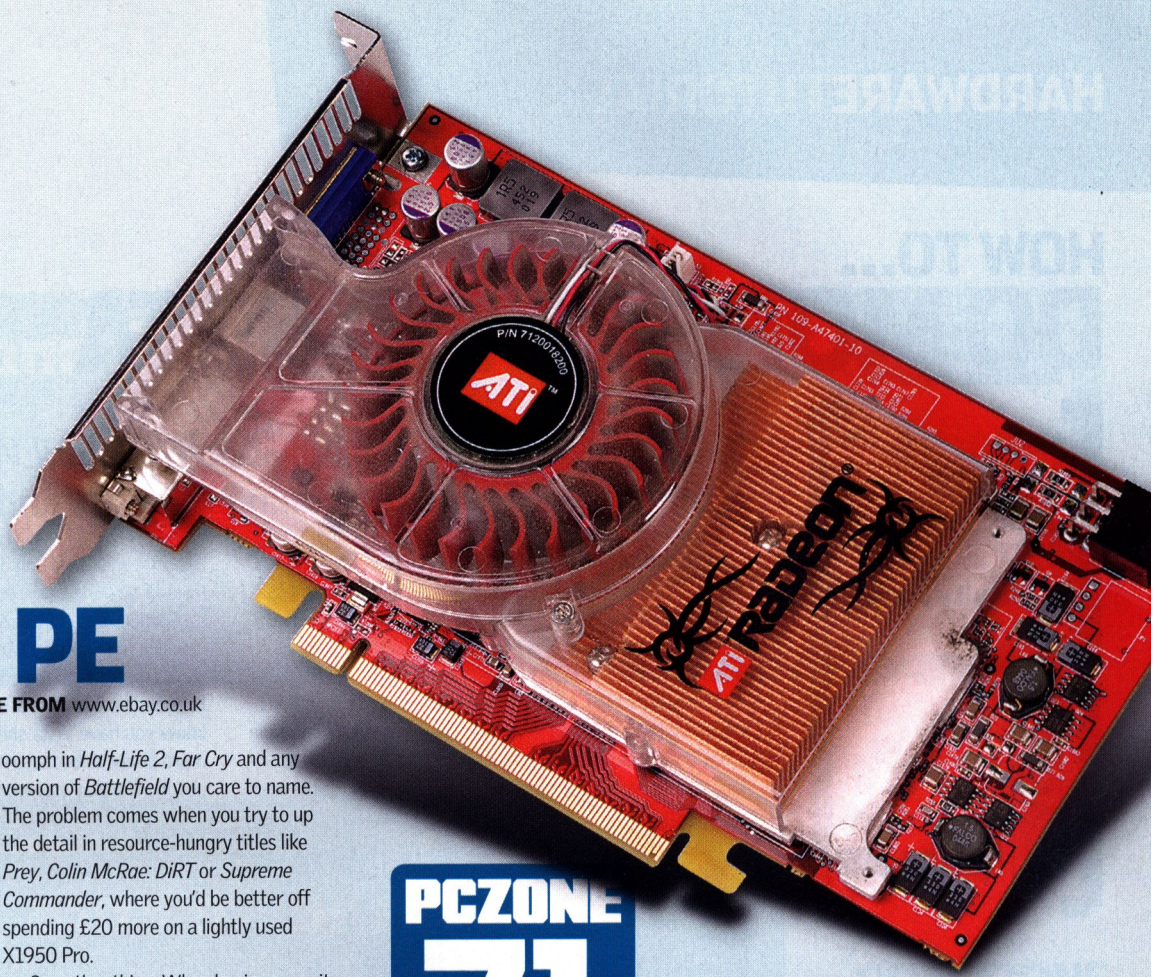
**We wanted to create something that was half the price of the Fusion Hydra but just as potent in games**

The secret is in the way the Fusion's E6550 chip has had its blood pressure artificially raised to run a hearty 3.0GHz overclock, some way off its more usual 2.33GHz. Unlike your grandad, however, it doesn't need beta blockers and actually relishes the added stress, turning in benchmark scores that are only a shade away from those of its award-winning bigger brother. It's hard to understand why you'd want to spend more. So... don't?

PCZONE 93

# RADEON X800 XT PE

**PRICE** £29 **MANUFACTURER** ATi **AVAILABLE FROM** www.ebay.co.uk



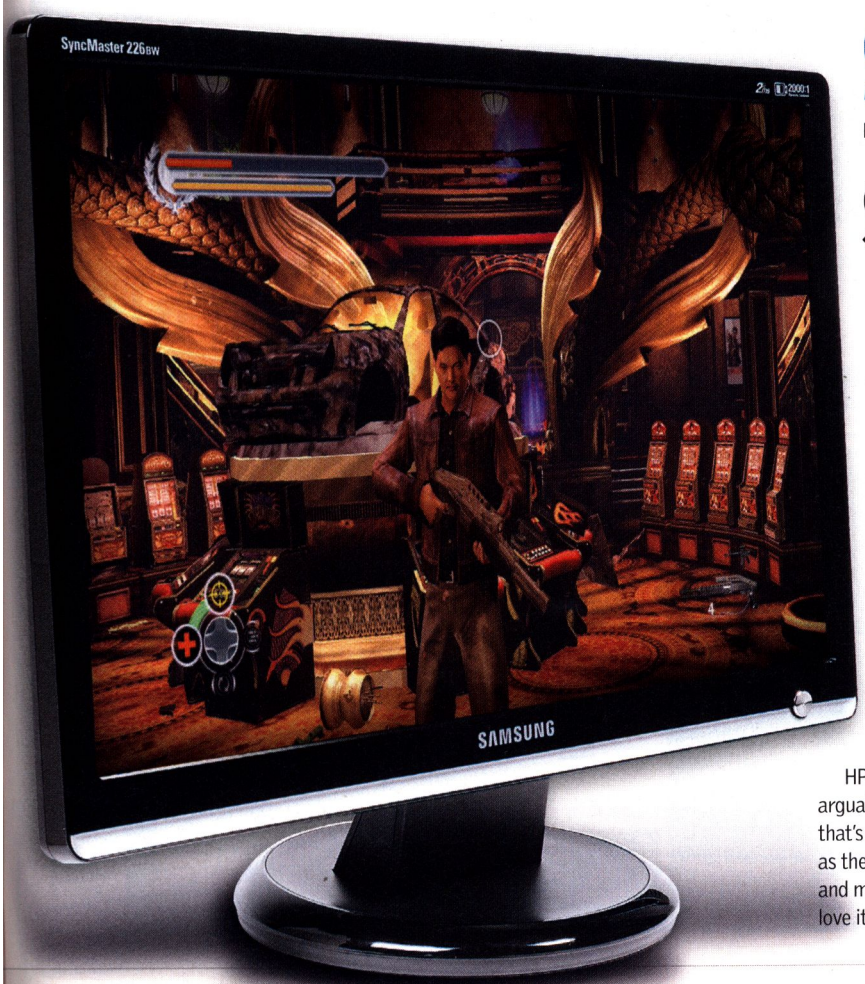

**WORKING TO A budget? You can find yesterday's flagship video cards on eBay for little more than the cost of a game.**

The X800 XT Platinum Edition was on sale three years ago, doing bloody battle with the similarly priced GeForce 6800 Ultra. Both cards can now be had at auction for around the £30 mark, with some finishing under £20.

Are they worth the bother? In a word, *almost*. While neither the 6800 nor the X800 are DX10 parts, both provide ample oomph in *Half-Life 2*, *Far Cry* and any version of *Battlefield* you care to name. The problem comes when you try to up the detail in resource-hungry titles like *Prey*, *Colin McRae: DiRT* or *Supreme Commander*, where you'd be better off spending £20 more on a lightly used X1950 Pro.

One other thing. When buying on a site such as eBay, do check the cost of postage before you bid, as many unscrupulous auction sellers are charging people over £8. The cheeky sods.

**PCZONE 71**




# SM226BW

**PRICE** £225 **MANUFACTURER** Samsung **WEBSITE** www.samsung.co.uk

**SAMSUNG RELEASED this 22-inch widescreen beauty earlier in the year with an RRP of £250. A few months on and we're edging closer to the £200 mark, undercutting rivals and making it worth a proper look.**

Like its competitors, the Samsung is quick – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs just a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of vibrant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks, making it ideal for any kind of game.

In real-world eyeball tests it's hard to detect any difference between Dell's E228WFPc and the SM226BW, making the latter a more obvious choice – after all, it's ten per cent cheaper.

HP's 5ms L2045W is a slightly smaller, arguably more handsome 20-inch product that's obsolete now and not as charismatic as the newcomers, but it is £100 cheaper and mine. Over the months I've come to love its USB hub and a stand that, unlike the Dell or Sammy, offers tilt, swivel and height adjustment.

Before sending you out to the shops, there is the SM226BW's bigger, newer brother to consider, the 24-inch SM245B. Here's a panel with the same magical image quality, but with noticeably more glass area – and all for under £350, which makes Dell's oft-lauded 24-inch range look somewhat overpriced.

What you buy depends largely on your budget. My main piece of advice is this: don't get too stressed by perceived differences in image quality. Just go for the screen at the size you want and with the features you need at the best price.

**PCZONE 90**

# HOW TO...
# DO MORE WITH VISTA

**Need:**
Windows Vista

**Time:**
Ongoing

**Difficulty level:**



Phil Wand
Deep Blue
Medium doofus
*Big Brother* contestant
Jamie Sefton

## Think you know your new Windows? *Phil Wand* takes a tour of Vista's more cunning features and free tools

**CHOOSE NEW COMPUTER, buy new computer. Open box and enjoy pleasing aroma of newness. Assemble, install the software you need to use, slump into chair and play the games you used to play. Sound familiar?**

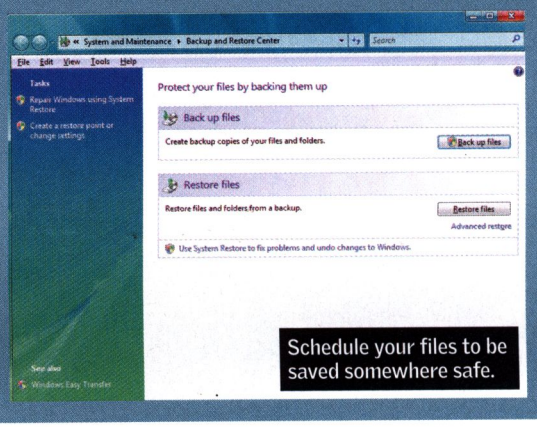
The sad fact is that the majority of PC owners couldn't tell you what version of Windows they're running, let alone what they could do with it to make their lives easier. As long as they've got Internet Explorer, Outlook Express and *Minesweeper*, they could be using a Trojan-infested Windows 98 and be none the wiser.

Gamers aren't quite so dim, but the operating system remains a genuine mystery to millions – it's little more than the desktop wallpaper that appears before they proceed to the main business of shooting people. Those of you who know you have Vista should really take the time to learn more about it, because it has a number of features that'll change the way you work with Windows. Read on for more!

## 01 Backup and Restore

The improved Backup and Restore feature enables you to make scheduled copies of all or some of your files. You can archive to another hard drive, to removable media – typically a DVD or CD – or even across the network to another PC or a dedicated network storage device such as a Buffalo LinkStation/ TeraStation or a Netgear SC101.

Automated backups by Vista take the pain out of securing your data. Rather than you manually copying files about, the Backup and Restore Center mechanises the entire process by 'watching' your files and copying only those which have changed. It also makes it easy to restore deleted files, and integrates System Restore for easy repair of a damaged system.



Schedule your files to be saved somewhere safe.

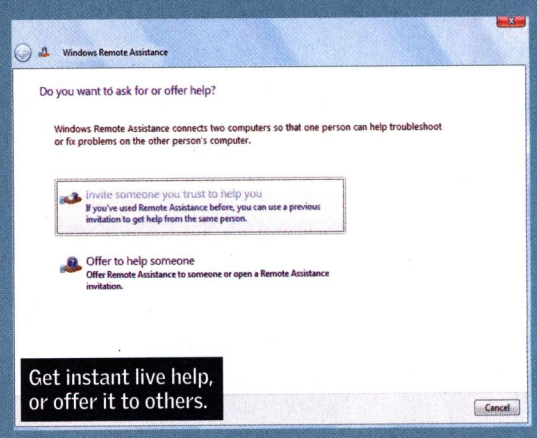



The **Buffalo LinkStation** and **TeraStation**, like the **Netgear SC101**, are network-attached storage (NAS) devices you connect to your router rather than your PC. This enables **all PCs/Media Centers on your network** to access them over wired and/or wireless Ethernet. Being Linux appliances, the Buffalo products are favourites of the Linux community and **well supported** online. If you're **buying an NAS device**, make sure you're getting the newest version, as older products can be slow and quirky. The 320GB LinkStation costs about £140 and the 1TB TeraStation around £400. The Netgear SC101 is available from £55, but you have to **add the hard drives yourself**. If you're **a Media Center user**, the **ATI Radeon 2600 XT** gives you HDCP compliance and HDMI output via a DVI adaptor, so you can use your PC with an HD-ready LCD or plasma.

## 02 Remote Assistance

Those of you who know the difference between Outlook and Outlook Express are likely to have had friends, relatives and even people you don't know calling on you for help. Thankfully, having to 'sort it out' in person should soon be a thing of the past.

Remote Assistance has always been available in Windows XP, but the Vista version is much improved. It uses less bandwidth and is able to hop across the internet unhindered by firewalls and routers, and it's much easier to get started. Your needy parent/friend/ whoever can click Remote Assistance in their Start menu and invite you to help by email. You just have to double-click on the message and take control of their machine. You can even send files and, if you have a mic or headset, remonstrate with them verbally.

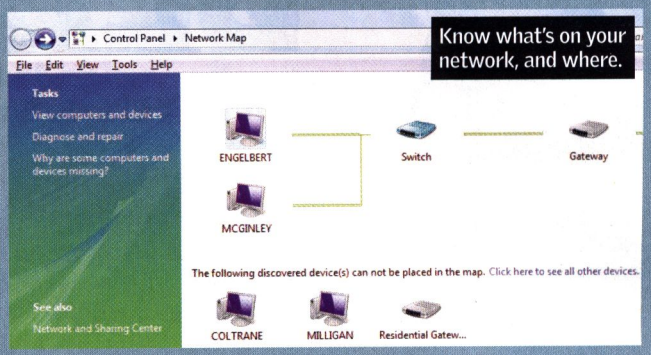


Get instant live help, or offer it to others.

## 03 Network and Sharing

Previously, Windows was a bit rubbish when it came to networking. It's not that it didn't work exactly; it's more that it was often a hit-and-miss affair browsing for remote PCs, and the dialog boxes which enabled you to control what files you were sharing (and to whom) were either so confusing that you were never sure if it was set up right, or looked like they were leftover bits of code from Windows NT.

The Network and Sharing Center makes things seem much easier. You now have one-click access to sharing and discovery settings – including the ability to automatically include photos and music – and a graphical representation of your network complete with switches, gateways and wireless access points.



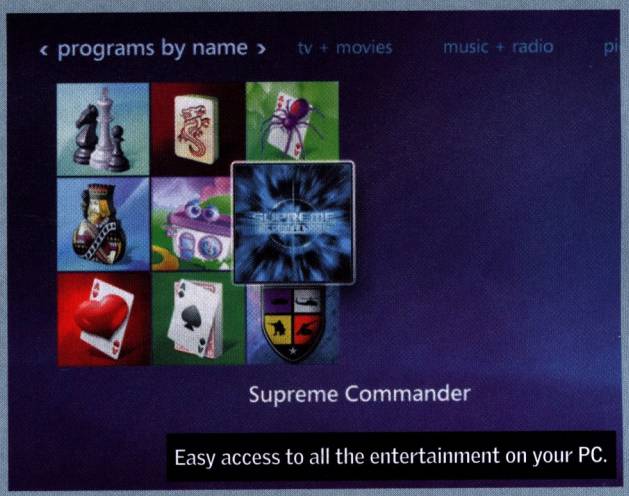
Know what's on your network, and where.

## 04 Media Center

With the addition of a £60 Hauppauge WinTV NOVA-T-500 dual TV tuner card, your Vista PC will be able to receive, record and organise all the free-to-air channels offered by Freeview.

Vista's revamped Media Center will automatically download the relevant electronic programme guide (EPG), and will enable you to browse through the schedules for your favourite shows. Click on the ones you want to record, or right-click for options such as capturing the entire series.

Other nifty features, such as pausing live feeds, skipping adverts and playing all the media content on your PC, should ensure that you never look at an ordinary TV the same way again.



Easy access to all the entertainment on your PC.

## 05 Games Explorer

Those of you with large hard drives and big game libraries will probably have all manner of icons sprawled over your desktop or lined up on the Quick Launch toolbar. Thankfully, Microsoft have done it differently in Vista. They've designed Games Explorer to be much like Media Center – details such as the box art, genre, rating and release date for each game show up automatically.

As well as providing a much simpler way to customise how your games are launched, the command bar gives you one-click access to support and patches for the majority of titles. As with everything on this page, start typing its name into the Start menu and it'll appear before you.



Look, Ma – games!

## Lucky 7 Unlucky for those involved with Vista, perhaps...

Aside from Vista's interface quirks, its compatibility issues and the general sense that it's actually no more stable than XP, the new operating system's biggest problem is its likely successor, Windows 7. Microsoft have stated publicly that they want to get into a three-year development cycle, meaning that we could be seeing test releases of the next Windows as soon as 2010. And while that may seem like a long way off, when you consider that many PC users have yet to upgrade to XP, you can see why many people might hang on and skip Vista altogether!

## QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

**Q So are you saying I need Vista now?**

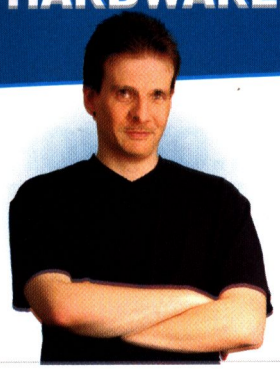
**A** That's a tough call really, because Vista can still be problematic with older games and with some drivers. If you're the sort of person who enjoys casual gaming and uses their PC more as a tool for browsing and emailing than for hardcore, cutting-edge entertainment, then Vista will do. But there's no genuine need to upgrade from XP.

**Q I'm currently running Media Center 2005. Is it worth upgrading?**

**A** The interface has been streamlined for Vista, but the functionality remains largely unchanged. You may find that Vista hogs your resources a little more, and that MCE 2005 is the more stable of the two.

**Q Isn't Remote Assistance a huge security risk?**

**A** You still have to enable the feature and to respond individually to requests.



# DEAR WANDY

**If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...**



## Problems?

We've all got them, you know... Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite green-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *WOW* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

## BIGGEST BROTHER

**Q** Every weekend I run a full anti-virus scan plus numerous spyware checks, and to be certain I have a look around my system folders to see if I can spot anything that shouldn't be there.

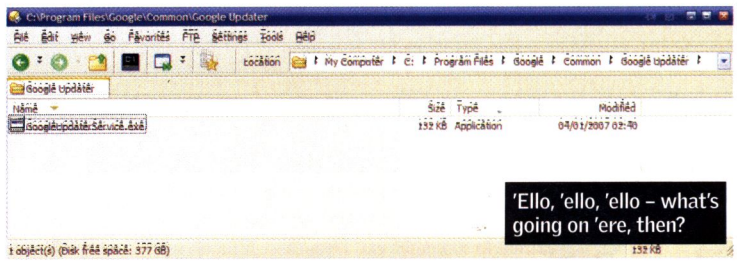
Just now I've bumped into a file called GoogleUpdaterService.exe that lurks in a folder called Google in my Program Files hierarchy. I don't remember installing any Google software, so how did it get there and what is it doing?

**Wil Hamilton**

**A** *Google have always portrayed themselves as the internet's least evil entity, but the company still ranks below the likes of AOL and (gasp!) Microsoft in Privacy International's annual listing of internet service companies. As a matter of fact, Google are last.*

*Privacy International explained that the company has "created the most onerous privacy environment on the internet... [no other] comes close to achieving status as an endemic threat to privacy", and subsequently accused Google of starting a smear campaign when the results were announced. If you can't conceive of your favourite and most fluffy engine being guilty of such behaviour, consider the fact that Google responded to recent criticisms with a U-turn on their policy of having cookies expire in the year 2038.*

*I had planned to continue my response in the same patronising tone, explaining how you were a complete fool if you thought Google's toolbar was any less dangerous than any other kind of rubbish add-on, given that they all involve selling your soul to shareholders and profit, but I then discovered I had the same executable on my hard drive. Ahem.*




'Ello, 'ello, 'ello – what's going on 'ere, then?

*Searching for the filename takes you to a Google page explaining the software "is being distributed to ensure users' Google Toolbar search bars are Vista-compatible", but I've never installed a toolbar and I'm not using Vista. I've never installed Google Earth either, but hang on... I have installed Picasa, which Google acquired from Idealab.*

*A little more digging reveals that it appears GoogleUpdaterService.exe is indeed bundled with the image-management utility, and as far as I can make out, there's no harm in simply deleting it. So I did.*

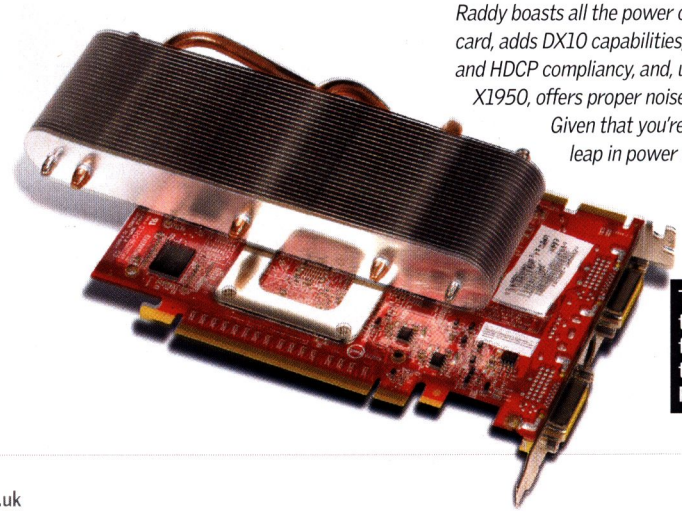
## PRO STILL GO?

**Q** Is it still worthwhile buying an ATI Radeon X1950 Pro, or should I just go for one of the new DirectX 10 video cards? I'm currently looking at upgrading to a Core 2 Duo E6600 system, but not sure about the graphics. Any advice would be greatly appreciated. My current system is an ASUS nForce2 A7N8X Deluxe with Athlon XP 2600+ and 7800 GS 255MB.

**John Irvine**

**A** *The X1950 Pro has just been ousted from the top spot in our Buyer's Guide by the £99 MSI 2600 XT. The newer Raddy boasts all the power of the outgoing card, adds DX10 capabilities, HDMI output and HDCP compliancy, and, unlike the old X1950, offers proper noiseless cooling.*

*Given that you're making a big leap in power from your old Athlon to a Core 2 system, anything you buy is going to seem seriously impressive. Hope you enjoy it.*



The 2600 XT takes over from where the X1950 Pro left off.

## GO-FASTER DAD

**Q** I'm looking for advice on how to upgrade my old computer. It has served me well over the past four years, but I now need some help. I haven't much of a budget, so the cheaper the better.

Currently I have a Compaq Presario bought from PC World. It has a 2.8GHz Celeron, GeForce 6600, 1GB RAM and an 80GB hard drive. I'm not sure what the motherboard is, and I'm not entirely sure how to find out.

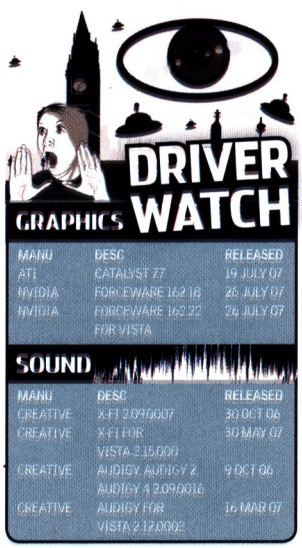
I'd like to know what you think I can do to help my games run smoother. *Oblivion* looks great, but along with other recent games can be quite slow. I don't have any knowledge of computers, although I did manage to put the graphics card in myself and not blow anything up.

Any help would be gratefully received, not only by me, but also my son, who insists I need to buy the latest top-end machine just to impress his mates. Not happening!

**Colin Hann**

**A** *I have no idea what system you have there, but any Presario with a Celeron sitting where a real processor should be isn't going to be upgradeable to the latest generation of chips. It's a technological cul-de-sac, and to get the results you want, you'll need to replace it.*

*If you're working to a tight budget, your best bet is to visit the Dell website and configure an Inspiron 530 with a Core 2 Duo E4300 chip, 2GB of memory and a 19-inch widescreen monitor, saving money by leaving the graphics as onboard. This should cost around £500. Now spend £90 on a Radeon 2600 XT from your favourite online vendor, bringing the total spend to a shade under £600. While you could save*



@ wandy@dearwandy.com
✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

# "Any Presario with a Celeron where a real processor should be won't be upgradeable to the latest chips"

Wandy tells dad Colin Hann the harsh truth

*a bit more by building the system yourself, if it's going to be used by several people in the house, it's good to have the peace of mind that comes from buying retail.*

## SHADER-Y BUSINESS

**Q** I installed the *DiRT* demo on the cover DVD from a few issues back, but after clicking the short cut, the hourglass went away. A spot of Googling revealed that *DiRT* does not – and will not – support cards that don't use Shader 3.0. My card is an ATI Radeon X800 GTO, which only supports Shader 2.0.

What card should I upgrade to, bearing in mind I don't want to go through this sort of thing again once DirectX 10 is fully up and running? I have an ASUS A8N-E with Athlon 64 3500+. Should I get a dual-core chip too? I have a budget of around £200.

**Simon Scoltock**

**A** *While your A8N-E will take any modern Radeon or GeForce, your ageing Athlon is going to be something of a weight around your neck that will only strangle your enjoyment of your graphics card. It's like buying an awesome pair of loudspeakers and using them with the Goodmans turntable your grandma left behind when she went into a home.*

*Still, my advice would be to buy the absolute fastest card within your budget, then start saving for an Intel-based system to replace the AMD one so you can really let everything inside stretch its legs. You'll find GeForce 8800 GTS 320MB variants online for as little as £170 these days, leaving you £30 to put in your processor fund.*

## IT'S ALL GONE DARK

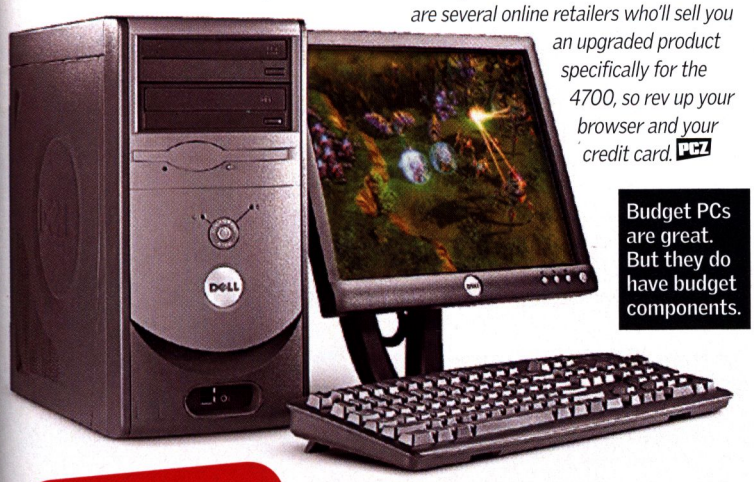
**Q** I recently bought *STALKER*, and after playing for ten minutes the screen suddenly cuts out and goes to standby. I then have to reboot and start the game from scratch. I've tried *F.E.A.R.* and the same thing happens, with the monitor cutting out after ten minutes and causing me to restart.

My PC is a Dell Dimension 4700, with a Pentium 4 3.00GHz, 2GB RAM and a Radeon X1900 GT. The graphics card was brand new from Crucial this Christmas.

I did have the system connected to my 37-inch TV the other day – could I have accidentally blown a component on the graphics card?

**Ben Marks**

**A** *You'll not blow any graphics card just by connecting it to a TV, whatever its size. More likely you're just stretching the limits of your Dimension's power supply, or you're suffering from heat build-up inside the case. Your X1900 GT requires a 450W PSU or better, and your Dimension almost certainly has the stock 305W unit. There are several online retailers who'll sell you an upgraded product specifically for the 4700, so rev up your browser and your credit card.* PCZ



Budget PCs are great. But they do have budget components.

# 50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE




## 28 JOOST

**COSTS FREE** FROM **joost.com**

I remain unconvinced by Joost, a desktop app touted as "the new way of watching TV". Nevertheless, it's definitely worth a look, because the platform has huge potential and is a free 10MB download.

The Joost system is basically a peer-to-peer media viewer made by the people who understand P2P technology best, the team behind Skype and Kazaa. Install, double-click to open and choose the channel you want to watch, then settle back in your chair with a cup of tea.

The quality is best described as reasonable and the channel selection as below average. A lot of the content seems rather dated, such as the *Happy Tree Friends* cartoon series which ceased to be funny in 2002. You can get straight to music videos, including Eric Prydz's prepubescent wank-fest *Call On Me*, but there have been versions of that available on YouTube for over a year.

Joost will succeed if they manage to pull off content-distribution deals with Fox and Endemol, and if they can iron out the various quirks in their user interface. It's mostly very good – the way you can be watching a full-length documentary, switch to an Aardman short and then be automatically returned to your documentary at the very point you left off is a great feature – but there are numerous problems with dual monitors and switching between windows and full-screen mode.

The best way to enjoy Joost is to visit the community-made site onthetoob.com and have a search for something to watch there.

**FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM**

(JACKIEBAUER) I have XP on a PC and Vista on a laptop. I have *Football Manager* on my PC, and I'd like to remotely access the PC from my laptop in order to continue saved games while around the house. **(grrrpoop) One of the free VNC-based remote-desktop apps from tightvnc.com would achieve this. Might work for a football-manager game, though I'm not sure it'd work for anything that uses intense 3D graphics. (Tetras) You could just transfer the save files to the laptop and have two installs running. That would be a bit unwieldy if you do it a lot, though, and you couldn't quickly switch.**

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**REMEMBER: SPEAKERS ARE NO GOOD IF YOU'VE GOT NO EARS**

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

# HARDWARE DIVIDE

**Here at *PC ZONE* we love many things: beer, kebabs, cake, nipples... Oh, and shiny new kit!**

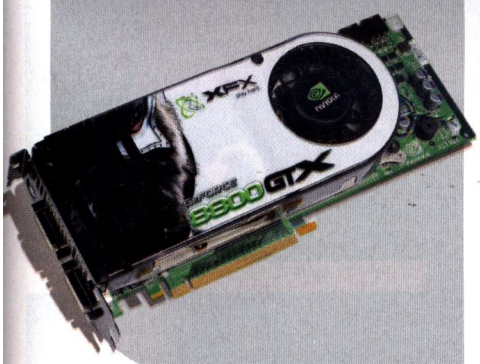
## LOADED?

GRAPHICS

### 8800 GTX

**EXPECT TO PAY** £370
**MANUFACTURER** XFX
**WEBSITE** xfxforce.co.uk

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.




PROCESSOR

### CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

**PAY** £600
**MAN** Intel
**WEB** intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD

### D975XBX2

**EXPECT TO PAY** £155
**MANUFACTURER** Intel
**WEB** intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD

### RAPTOR 150GB

**EXPECT TO PAY** £149
**MANUFACTURER** Western Digital
**WEBSITE** www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN

### VP930

**EXPECT TO PAY** £250
**MANUFACTURER** ViewSonic
**WEBSITE** viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUNDCARD

### SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

**EXPECT TO PAY** £140
**MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs
**WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS

### Z-5500

**EXPECT TO PAY** £195
**MANUFACTURER** Logitech
**WEBSITE** www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

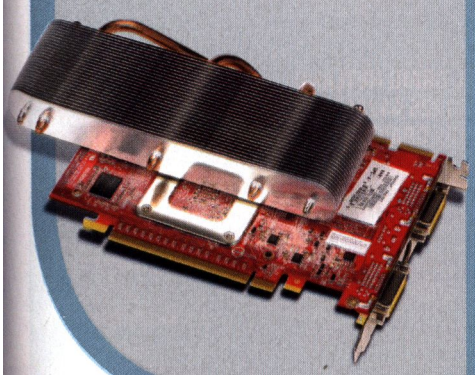
## SKINT?

GRAPHICS

### 2600 XT

**EXPECT TO PAY** £99
**MANUFACTURER** MSI
**WEBSITE** msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's Radeon 2600 XT is a mainstream card that provides X1950 Pro-rivalling levels of power and DirectX 10 together with HDCP and HDMI output – all wrapped up in a genuinely silent waistcoat and with a double-digit price tag. Ideally suited to home-theatre fans and gamers alike.



PROCESSOR

### CORE 2 DUO E6300

**EXPECT TO PAY** £105
**MANUFACTURER** Intel
**WEBSITE** intel.com

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD

### CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

**EXPECT TO PAY** £52
**MANUFACTURER** ASRock
**WEB** asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD

### CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

**EXPECT TO PAY** £30
**MAN** Western Digital
**WEBSITE** www.wdc.com

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

### VA903M

**EXPECT TO PAY** £118
**MANUFACTURER** ViewSonic
**WEBSITE** www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19-inch screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280x1024 panel offers greater depth than the 1440x900 panel of its sibling VA1912w.

SOUNDCARD

### SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

**EXPECT TO PAY** £32
**MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs
**WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS

### INSPIRE P5800

**EXPECT TO PAY** £37
**MANUFACTURER** Creative
**WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

Launching In London September '07

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# FREEPLAY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Born free, as free as the wind blows

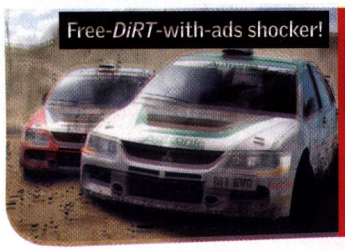
FREE GAMES!

## WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH



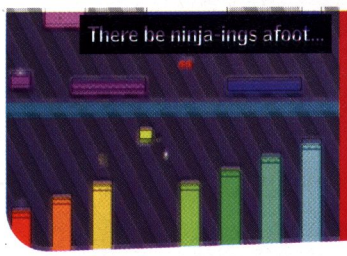


**106 Demo pages**
Taking a big, nutritious bite from the free slice of the full-game pie

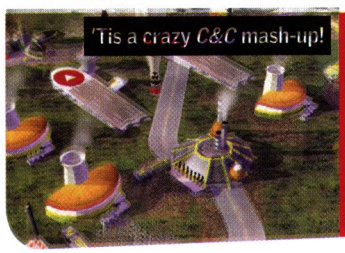


**108 News**
The only news omelette made with 100 per cent free-range event eggs

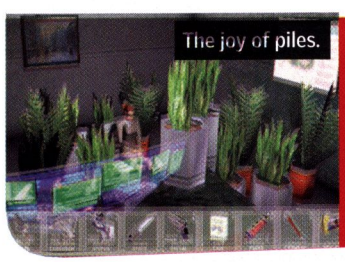


**112 Freeware**
Invade Steve Hogarty's personal space of freeware gaming

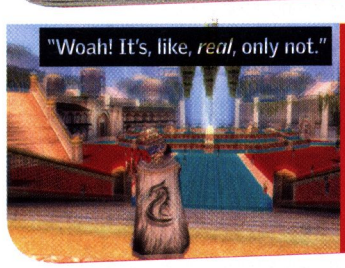


**114 Play!**
Revive swooning games with the smelling salts of modification



**116 Jackass**
How much fun can you have putting stuff onto things? *Too* much!



**118 Online Zone**
The internet? All those wires and whatnot? I give it six months...


## Livin' free

**I F YOU'RE A** celebrity, the world is full of free things. Companies are desperate to be associated with your unjustifiable social kudos. Nike, however, see little benefit in having us fat proles waddling around in their sweatshop garments, so we're generally left to pay.

I've picked up a few free-stuff tricks, though. Why not try drinking a bottled drink as you walk around the shop? The cashier often assumes you had it when you walked in, and won't charge you for it. If you don't look at the total before you leave the shop, this might even be legal – I'll tell you after the inevitable trial.

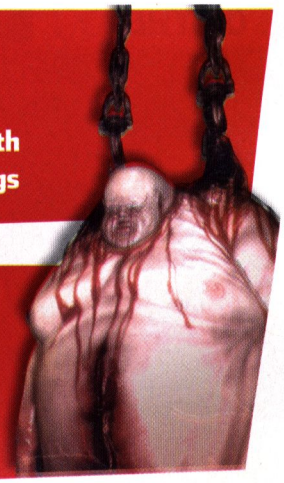
Other tricks are obvious – saying you need to go to the cash machine when it's your round, then never going back. Borrowing five pounds off a mate, then accusing them of sexual abuse and getting a restraining order.

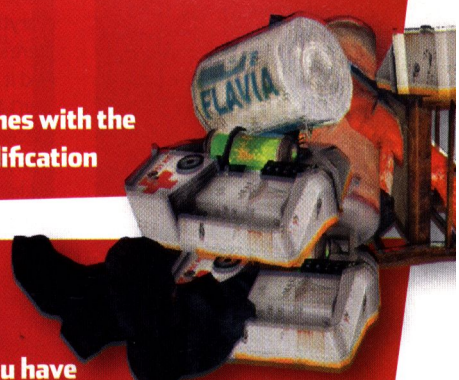
My latest method of saving money was discovered unexpectedly. After two visits to an emergency dentist resulted in an emergency extraction, I was positively giddy from codeine, local anaesthetic and ten days of constant face-pain. This made me uncommonly affable, and I ended up chatting with the dentist for a few minutes after he'd stuffed my gob full of wadding. When the time came for him to charge me, he started to say the agreed sum of £43, then gave me a conspiratorial wink and said, "This is continuing treatment, isn't it? There's no charge."

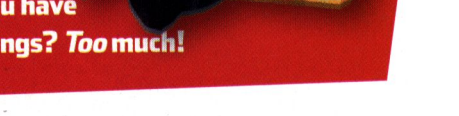
Who'd have thought that being nice was a path to blag? I feel like I've unlocked a secret cave of free, and it's full of spinning coins.

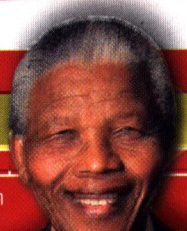
Jon Blyth

**Jon Blyth, staff writer**







**PCZONE FREE-O-METER**



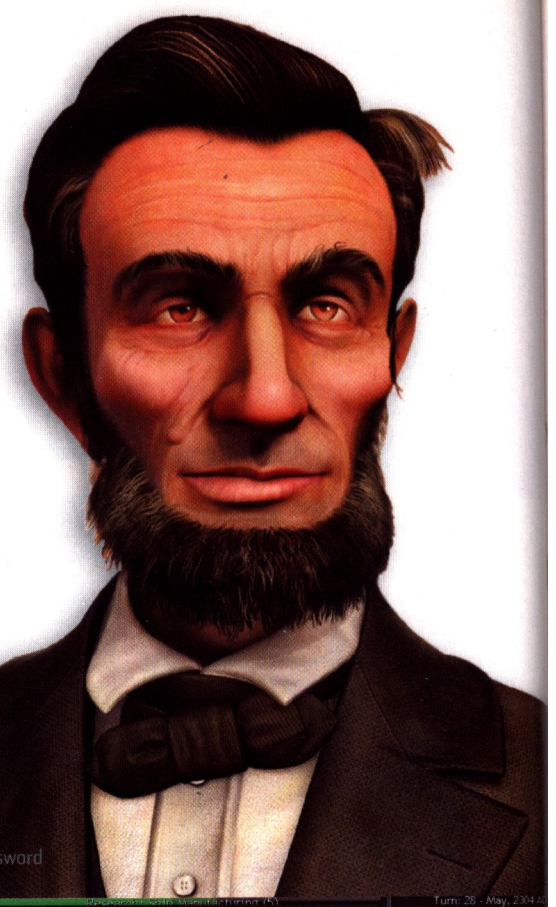
0 HOURS

351.6 HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

# Demos

***Jon Blyth* rounds up our free DVD**



PCZONE ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email **support@futurenet.co.uk**, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

## CIVILIZATION IV: BEYOND THE SWORD

### The penis mightier

www.2kgames.com/civ4/beyondthesword

**AS GREAT A GAME** as *Civ IV* is – and it is – it'll take you a lot of time to get the hang of it unless you're a long-standing fan of the series. If you're coming to *BTS* without playing *Civ IV* first, you can multiply that disadvantage tenfold. Adding corporations, expanding espionage and incorporating updates to popular mods, *BTS* adds even more depth and complexity to 'the most complicated board game in the world™'.

For fans who've exhausted the billions of possibilities in the vanilla game, this demo will enable you to play 100 turns of the Final Frontier scenario, which ships everything out into space. That means there's a sexy new tech tree to gawp at. And it will be gawping, because 100 turns won't take you much past trans-galactic space gates, or something. Still, if you're a *Civ* enthusiast, that's all you'll need to be tickled in all your most cherished places.








**SPACE DUST**
This purple space dust is a new feature on the, er, landscape that damages any units that end their turn in it. If your ship can make it through in one go, though, then ahead warp factor five, as it were.



**GREEN AND BLACK (HOLE)'S**
This science-y bastard will suck any nearby units towards it, and utterly destroy any units that cross the event horizon and enter the singularity. We watch *Star Trek*.



**I LOVE YOU, FLASH** But we only have 100 turns to conquer the universe



**CHOCOLATE REIGN**
Here you can see that suns are a bit like cities, only you put stuff on planets instead of, erm, streets. Makes sense really. They work differently to cities in vanilla *Civ IV*, so be sure to pay attention.



**GALAXY**
The more astute among you will have realised by now that we're going for a confectionery theme, and if we're not careful, that might get in the way of actually providing you with useful information.



# TRANSFORMERS: THE GAME

## Fancy dress nightmares: we all came as cars

www.transformersgame.com

**IT'S LAZY JOURNALISM** to describe something in terms of a list of other things. It's like you've just spotted a few obvious features, and you're forcing the reader to do all the brainwork, making them weave a confused carpet out of the cultural references you're idly slinging at them.

Sometimes, however, it's a necessity – say, for example, when you've just squandered the majority of your word count on a brief discussion of lazy journalism. So then, *Transformers: The Game* (or *Le Jeu*, as the installation claims) is a mix of *GTA*, *Excite Truck*, *Crazy Taxi* and Big Robot Punch Attack. WITH TRANSFORMERS.




### FIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE

**Kicking ass and taking, uh, number plates**



**PARLEZ-VOUS FRANCAIS?**
The installation process is in French – but don't worry; Bumblebee won't try to sell you two baguettes and an onion. Just click "Suiver", "Oui" and "Ooh la la".



**MID-TRANSFORM**
One thing they've got right is the transforming – it feels pretty cool, and you can flip fluidly without killing your momentum. Even if this mid-transform pic is a little... well, undignified.

# LOKI Well Loki here

www.loki-game.com

**MYTHOLOGY IS GREAT.** Mortals being fannied about by amoral godly forces, you say? A sure recipe for high jinks.

In situations where humanity is subject to the whims of interventionist gods, it's always best to be a god yourself, or at least a hero. Sure, you may end up getting your liver torn out by an eagle for the rest of your natural life, but looking on the bright side, at least it's a decent story to tell your mates down the pub.

Playing this demo will give you the chance to advance a few levels, gather a few Thor points and kill a few dozen wolves with a single click. It's the best mythological action RPG since *Titan Quest*. Which would sound more impressive if *Titan Quest* hadn't come out last year.



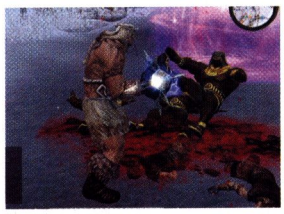

1. This towering, tat-covered hunk of pure manliness is you. And you actually do look like this in real life, according to our target demographic.
2. This is an enemy. With a mere click of a mouse button, you can extinguish his pesky AI routines. Because you're a god, baby.
3. Attack this swirly purple thing, too. You might as well; it's all XP for the levelling up, and those Thor points won't earn themselves.

### It's clubbering time

**How Mr Demo Man rolls...**



**MIGHT**
Playing as the predefined Level 6 character in the demo will make you strong enough to kill wolves and soldiers with a single blow.



**MAGIC**
Well, you don't get much magic in the first hour of the demo, so here's another picture of you smashing a head in with that glowing club.

# MOVIE BLOWOUT... ON TOAST



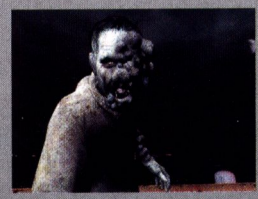
**BEOWULF**
www.gamesfoundation.com/beowulf
If *Loki* doesn't contain enough mythology and legend for you, then have a look at the *Beowulf* video. The website's pretty strange at the moment, requiring a password we don't have, but hopefully they'll be a bit freer with the info soon...



**CALL OF DUTY 4**
www.charlieoscardelta.com
Now that we've got *BioShock* out of our system, we can start getting excited about other stuff again. And what better to start with than the modern-day incarnation of the classic WWII shooter? By God, we'll answer the call.



**CRYSIS**
www.ea.com/crysis
Come on, EA. You've teased us long enough. Our excitement is producing a foam that hasn't been seen since someone in a sitcom put too much powder into a washing machine. Finish the damn game, Crytek!

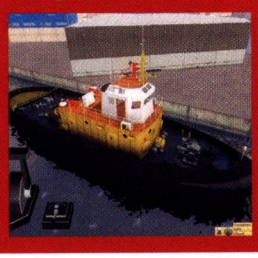


**LEFT 4 DEAD**
www.l4d.com
OK, so the title suggests shit text-speak or a Prince song, but the game still looks great – lest we forget, *Left 4 Dead* is the co-op zombie shooter that pits a team of four survivors against an onslaught of imaginative undead. Check out their progress here...

## PCZONE HOT DOWNLOADS

### SHIP SIMULATOR 2008

www.gamershell.com/download_20388.shtml



It may not sound like the most exciting game in the world, and it'd be a lie to suggest that it is. But there's sedate, therapeutic enjoyment to be gleaned from those majestic seagull cries, and mooring up a cruiser has never been so... simulated.

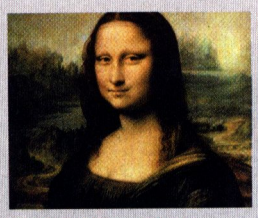
### GODS: LANDS OF INFINITY

www.gamershell.com/download_20322.shtml




When a game has characters and places called Bellarion and Xarax, you might wonder if it's about pharmaceuticals. Only when you hear the name Arswaargh will you realise that it's a fantasy action game. Arswaargh, indeed!

SNIPPETS



**INDIE GAMES AS ART**

mentisworks.blogspot.com

The 'are videogames art?' debate is fairly nonsensical, and doomed to start with someone saying "first we need to define art". However, when indie game-makers set out to make 'art' games they're almost always interesting, if not always good. The Mentisworks blog has recently rounded up 27 art games, so check 'em out for yourself.



**INDIE GAMES AS GAMES**

www.tigsource.com/features/games1-10.html

Meanwhile, over at The Independent Gaming Source, there's a top 50 of independent games. From *Cave Story* to *Death Worm*, the list covers some great titles – some of which are commercial (like *Darwinia*), but the majority of which are good ol' freeware/shareware.

# NO, YOU CAN'T BAN GAMES

## Would-be killjoys run into a brick wall of sensibleness

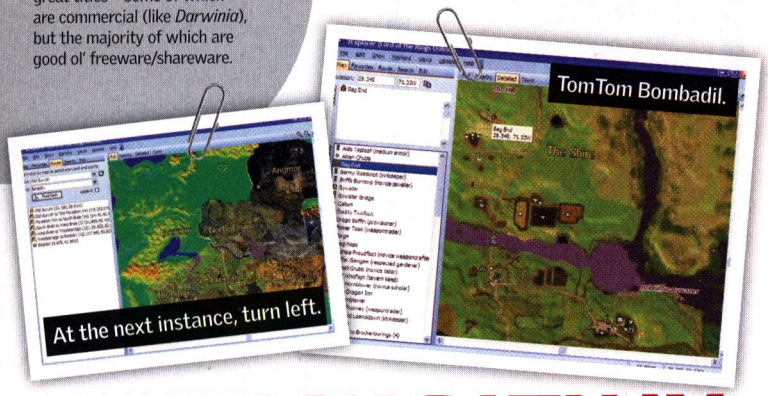
**AMERICAN COURTS HAVE** decided once again that banning computer games isn't a legal way of limiting their perverting and murderous effects on the nation's younglings. This time it's California getting its ill-drafted and poorly-conceived laws overturned, following similar cases in Illinois, Stupidland and Godville.

As we understand it, US Law states that when you're seeking to limit constitutional rights like freedom of speech, you have to prove that your laws respond to a public need. You also have to prove that they meet that need, and that – in doing so – they go no further than they have to. So when you haven't proved any link between videogames and children firing guns into each other, the courts will stick their bottom lips out and go, "Durrr, my name's Jack Thompson."

Then, Californian governor Arnold Schwarzenegger stepped in! Arnie advocates a ban on sales to minors ("violent videogames should not be sold to children under 18"), before going on to say – in the very next sentence – that it's parents who should decide ("choosing games that are appropriate for kids should be a decision made by their parents"). With contradictory logic like that from the 'ban this filth' brigade, more liberal folk can feel comparatively sane.



The law says we can all keep playing – for now.




# FANTASY SATNAV

## MMOs get map-happy with zExplorer

www.zuggsoft.com/index.php?p=zexplorer

**IT HAPPENS ALL** the time. Some bloke's just asked you to kill 15 wargs, and you can't find a warg for shit nor toffee. What you need is a comprehensive map of the world, annotated by users, that exposes every last cranny and a huge number of nooks. NPCs and quest items will be exposed as plainly as a judge's penis on a crowded train.

Some might argue that half the satisfaction of playing MMOs is gained from developing an organic knowledge of the areas as you become powerful enough to explore them. But then again, that takes a lot longer, involves lots of running around with little benefit, and is a bit much like hard work. zExplorer makes exploring easy, and can be trialed free for 30 days.

# SPACE MAPPED

## *X3* fan maps made officially available

www.egosoft.com/news/current_en.php

**MOST OF OUR** amateur cartography has involved trying to map out the paragraphs of a *Fighting Fantasy* book, or some text-only adventure like *The Hobbit*. Michael Clausen, however, was so taken with the enormous world of *X3* that he decided to map it out. Fully, and with insane attention to detail.

Developers Egosoft were so impressed with the hi-res images that they've made them available for download on their site. If you have any dealings with *X3*, these maps will make your inner child gasp with awe and pleasure, and you'll immediately go back to mapping out *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*.



Space: no longer the final frontier.

# STEAM COMMUNITY GOES BETA

## Games For Windows – LIVE suddenly seems even less relevant

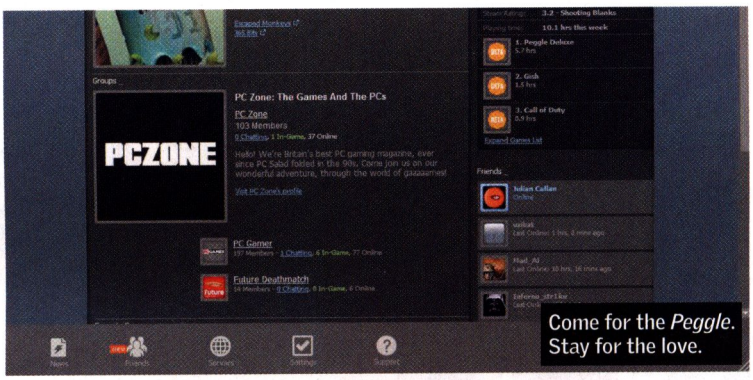
**VALVE'S STEAM SERVICE** recently opened up its community, for a trial beta run of the features soon to be available to all. Among the many features added to the vanilla Steam service are voice chat, profiles, groups, etc, and if you set up a group, there'll be a chatroom, events – basically everything Facebook's got, but for games.

We've just lost an afternoon messing around with the features, but that's because the beta's very slow, and truth be told, a tiny bit buggy. Watch out, though – it tells everyone what you're up to, so if you don't want your mates to know you play *Chuzzle Deluxe* all weekend, make sure you turn that feature off. Or blame your little sister.

With Microsoft's approach to a Windows gaming network looking increasingly patchwork (throwing the word 'LIVE' at loads of different things does not mean they're a coherent system, lads), Steam has just launched what Microsoft seem incapable of doing – a PC version of Xbox LIVE Arcade.

Join our group at steamcommunity .com/groups/pcz.





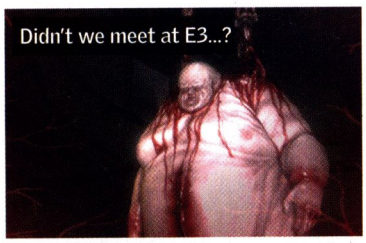

# CODEMASTER

## Full, commercial games: free at last (except with ads)

**WE'D ALREADY SHRUGGED** our shoulders and assumed that advertising in games was going to be a cash bonus for publishers that would never really get handed down to the gamer. However, Codemasters has now made a deal with GameTap that seems to be saying that you can play all their forthcoming titles for free.

The catch is simply that you have to put up with adverts. Does that mean we'll be playing *Jericho* in a Barkerian vision of hell that features massive billboards for tea-bags and jam? Seems not – the adverts will be limited to the menus.

Gaming has hardly been divorced from commercials of late, but so far this hasn't delivered much in the way of benefits for us. If this deal works out, and advertising replaces sales revenues in PC gaming, then it's a benefit no-one was expecting. Our immediate response is that it's too good to be true, but we'll just have to see as more details emerge...










## SNIPPETS



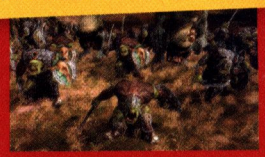
**SPECTOR'S BLOGGING**
Junctionpoint.wordpress.com
Warren Spector is the owner of an adorable dog called Maggie, and also made the best game ever on the PC. If you want to know what goes through his mind at any given time, he recently started a blog. He limits himself mainly to gaming, so there's distressingly few references to Maggie, but it's still worth a read.



**DUNGEON MASTER**
dmds.sourceforge.net
It's not strictly PC news, but if you loved DOS classic *Dungeon Master*, and own a Nintendo DS, you'll be thrilled to the point of spectacular indignity when you hear of the homebrew remake that's on its way. The pre-alpha version is available for download now. You'll need a flash cart, of course.

## Bug-Fix of the Month

**THIS MONTH**
**WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS**



The info for the latest patch gloats: "no hero, no siege, no mercenaries, and no items". Hey, thanks!

## Movie of the month

**PROJECT OFFSET**

*Project Offset* (working title) is a forthcoming medieval FPS from Offset Software – a new team started by half of the chaps who made *Savage*. It has a taste of the *Dark Messiah* about it, but is looking a bit more deep and nimble, with five classes who can play co-op on the single-player campaign. It's on the disc.



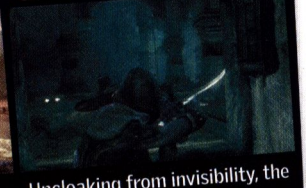
The vid starts with a few art stills. Don't smash anything – it goes into gameplay soon.



Here we go – shields, swords, and people rolling around like *Metroid's* morph ball.



This massive beast is too far away to stab in the ankle, so get back to stabbing humans.



Uncloaking from invisibility, the hero slices open some guy's neck. Unsporting, but effective.

# VANITY FARE



## *Jon Blyth* samples the games that are free, if you've no self-respect

**IF YOU'RE LIKE** us, you'll raise an eyebrow at the phrase 'free-to-play', believing the term to be a sweet-smelling lasso with which to snare your tiny cash cow. Often, it's just a different way of packaging a demo. But these games are different – they only cost you money if you want to look good, or command respect. They're also directed mainly towards children, who tend to be into all that kind of shit. How are these clever swine after your coins?

## MAPLESTORY

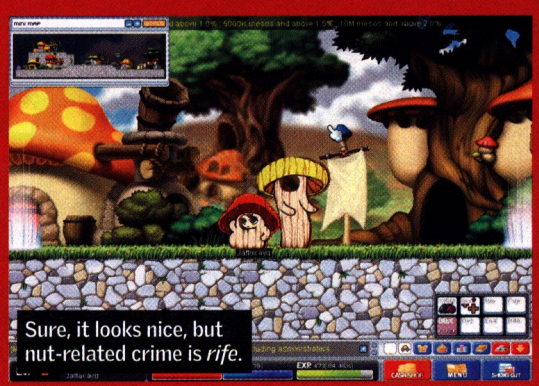
### Massively multiplayer online side-scrolling platformer maplestory.nexon.net

**MAPLESTORY IS** the colourful 2D-platformer MMO that makes Korean children get their mothers to grind their characters while they're at school. At least, that's what got it noticed a couple of years ago. This year, the cartoonish game has dropped its cutesy sprite anchor in Europe.

It's cute as hell, with combat relying on platforming-style timing as much as your skills and kit. But there's no PvP, so the limit of your fights with other players will be kill-stealing and standing on top of them and pretending to fart. One player – HateKiller, to name and shame – did try to scam me out of my clothes, so kudos goes to him. How many naked and crying ten-year-olds there are in the world thanks to HateKiller, one can only guess. He was kind of the exception, though. *MapleStory* isn't about thrills and spills – but it's sweet enough, and stripping aside, it's a safe environment for children.

So how does it appeal to human vanity? Via the Cash Shop, which offers a constantly cycling array of limited-edition accessories to make your character look ever more 'the bomb'. Said stuff is either useless and pretty or obtainable by just playing a bit longer (XP boosts, for example), so it's never essential to spend money. After all, you can always get mummy to keep playing for you when you go to school.






# AUDITION

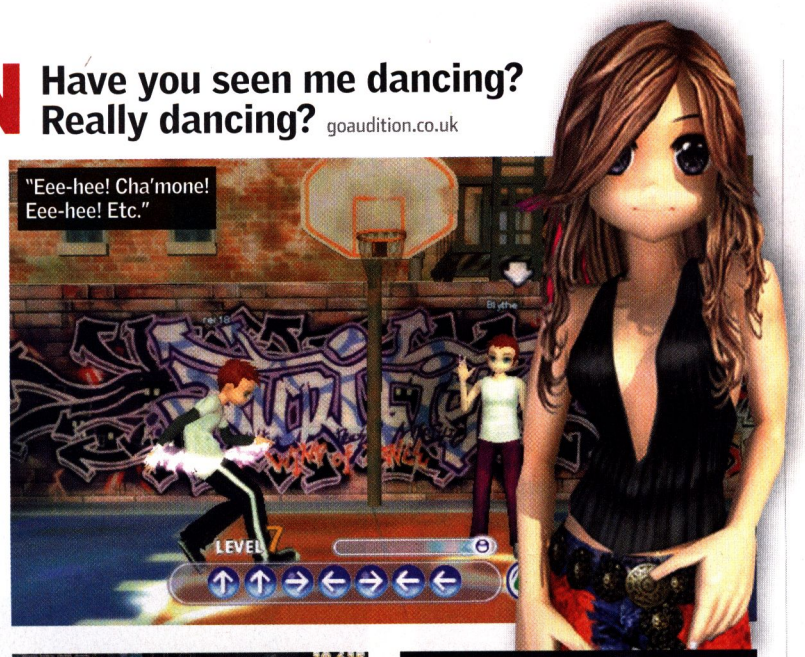
## Have you seen me dancing? Really dancing?

goaudition.co.uk

**AUDITION IS ALL** the simplicity of *Dancing Stage* with absolutely none of the exercise – just tap the arrow keys in the order it tells you to, then press space. You don't have to keep to any kind of rhythm – just flail your digits into a 135bpm claw, then tap space on the fourth beat.

It progresses quickly from piss-easy to unimaginably hard, but judging by the people I was playing against, it's a motor skill you can pick up with enough practice. As a dance-master-in-my-own-mind, it was galling to be so outrageously naff at a game, and even worse to lose to people less than half my age. So you can imagine how I wanted to show off with my clothes. I succeeded, in a way – after spunking my in-game cash on all manner of stuff, in addition to losing, I also looked like a bad drag queen. Nothing's embarrassing when you're dressed like that.

If you want out of your white vest and mullet, a fully decorated avatar will cost you around £9, but you can also rent clothes if you're not sure you want an imaginary tiara forever.










# PUZZLE PIRATES

www.puzzlepirates.com

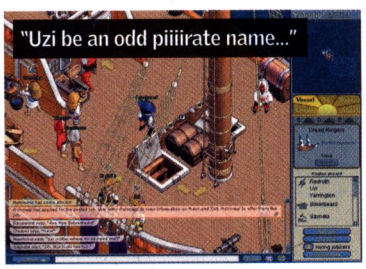
## Experience Bluebeard's little-known love of shape-matching

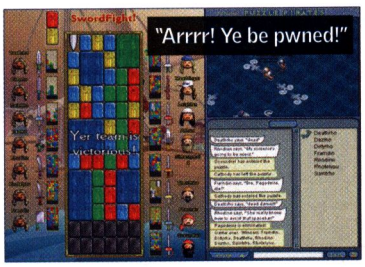
**FOR A GAME** which seems to invite the most casual of gamers, *Yohoho! Puzzle Pirates* has a surprisingly deep economy, with pieces of eight earned in-game and doubloons bought with real money – then traded online like other commodities.

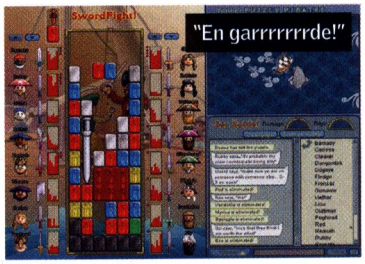
Pitched at a slightly more adult audience, and more complicated, *YPP* enables you to show off in true suburban style, buying a big house and keeping it lovely. You can stand in your garden and /yell about how many doubloons your pink flamingos cost, too.

Although at first glance it appears to be all about reducing piracy to a series of match-three and *Tetris*-style games, there's a surprising amount of stuff to acquire in *YPP*. And paying for it is much easier than doing those damn puzzles.



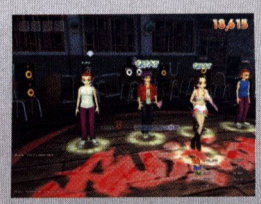

## FREE TO P(L)AY

How not free is free-to-play? Join us on a journey from 'not completely free' to 'potentially costing something'...



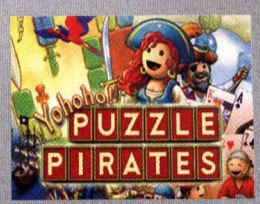
### SHORT CUTS

Although hard work can get you everything you need in the game, how's about paying a little here and there for XP-boost short cuts? *MapleStory* features this kind of thing in addition to the 'looking lovely' stuff.



### MR VAIN

Sure, you get to play and have all the features you need, but to *look cool* you'll have to stump up some coin. There's no limit on how much you can spend, and a cool pink hat will only seem cool for so long. *Audition* features this heavily.




### TRADING PLACES

*Puzzle Pirates* enables you to buy doubloons to spend on kit and subscriptions, or trade in-game in a commodities market. This means you can combine in-game earnings with real-life money to get a discounted subscription.



### WHY NOT SUBSCRIBE?

*Dungeon Runners* allows you to play everything for free; however, items, levels and features remain unavailable unless you pay the subscription. You can spend absolutely zilch, or a fiver a month. Fair nuff, really.

# Freeware

PCZONE ON THE DVD

**When tortured, *Steve Hogarty* yells "Freedom!", not "Mercy"**

Freeware brings you the best free games content your kindly Uncle Internet has to offer. This month, discover the joys of free ninja-ing (and ninja-besting), blast pesky ASCII characters out of the sky, travel through time robo-style and play a game that looks like it might be broken.

## NINJAH I believe that you are ninja too

FREEWARE GAME OF THE MONTH

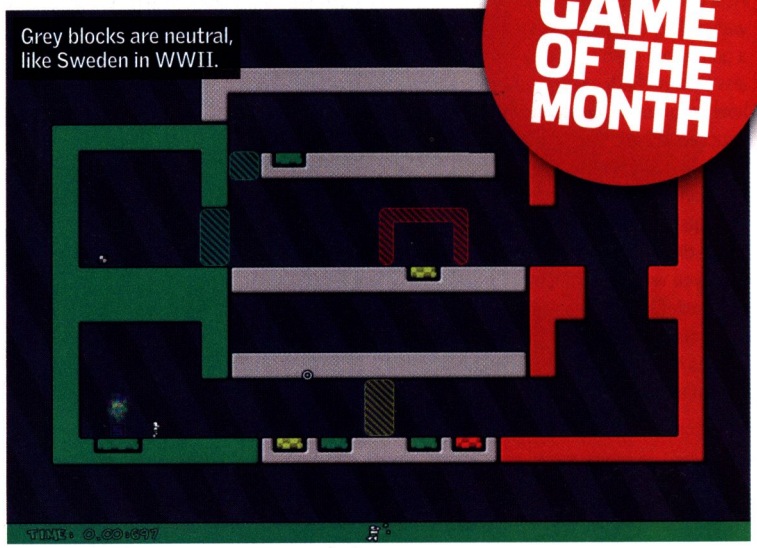
Dev: Evil Dr.Bin | www.evildrbin.com/ninjah

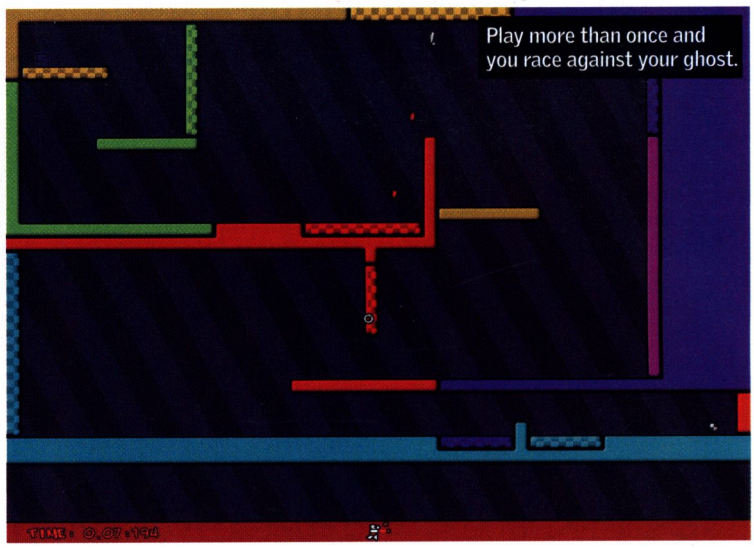
**I ALWAYS LIKE** to start these reviews by mentioning how sometimes the games can elicit some sort of astonished reaction from across the office. Seriously, there's never more interest in what's happening on my screen than when I'm grinding through another load of freeware titles, looking for something decent to write about. *Ninjah* was one of those games, with a random bloke standing up and demanding to know what I was playing with terrifying immediacy.

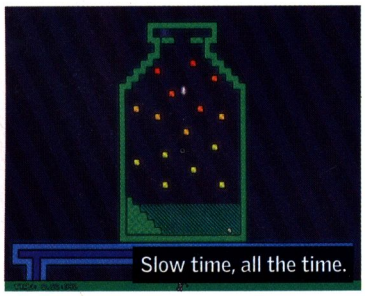
*Ninjah*'s got bright colours and a really simple set of rules. You are the ninja, and your task is to get to the end of the level using your ninja rope, your ninja jumping legs and your ninja gun. You can only touch surfaces that match your current colour, and you can change your colour by touching chequered surfaces. I'm not certain what part of that makes people shout across the room and point at my monitor, but there you go. That's just the sort of crazy thing that's always happening in our office.

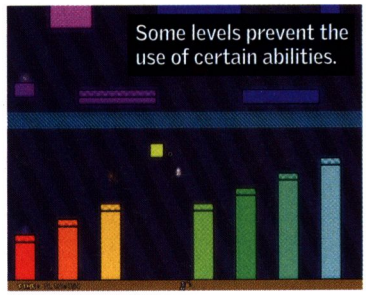
In fact, it's not until you've progressed a few levels into the game that you start to realise what's so great about it. You'll come across a seemingly impossible drop. This drop demands ninja-like reflexes, rather fittingly, with a quick left and then right movement in order to avoid hitting the deadly walls. What you have to do to survive is whack the spacebar to slow down time, enabling you to perfectly coordinate your movements.

You can do this any time you like as well, so if you come across a particularly tricky jump, all you have to do is slow time right down and make extremely accurate movements. The ability to reduce the passage of time to a sluggish quantum crawl doesn't destroy the challenge either – later levels are extremely complicated and demanding, with loads of colour-changing and tricky platforms to navigate. There's a level editor and downloadable map packs to keep things interesting, too. This is possibly now our favourite ninja-centric freeware game.



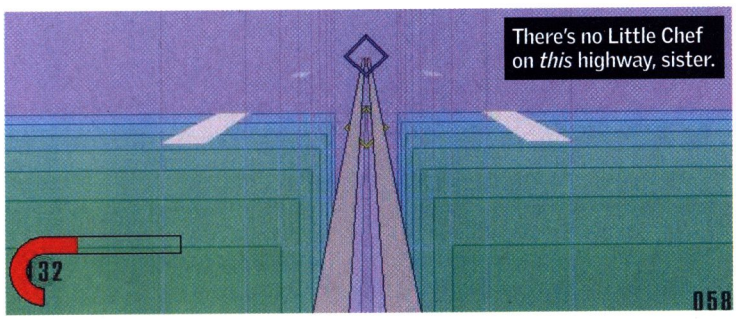






## SHOOT 'EM In the ASCII

Dev: Tringi | tinyurl.com/ytclrc

**LET'S SAY YOU'VE** made a fairly basic game in which you control a 3D turret shooting down meteors as they fall towards the ground. Very few people would care about it; in fact, some of them might even laugh in your face and say mean things like, "Well, why don't you just marry *Missile Command* – you obviously love it so much." Now, imagine you went the extra mile and made the graphics look like *The Matrix*'s version of alphabet soup. Yep, that's what we've got here. *Shoot 'em*'s visuals are comprised entirely of fixed-width ASCII characters, so it looks, as long as you don't blur your vision, like blocks of text are flying about the screen. We recall some ATI drivers that did a similar thing for normal games, meaning we could shoot Nazis whose eyes were represented by dollar signs and asterisks. What larks!




# SWITCH LANES

## Mirror, signal... no actual manoeuvring

Dev: TERU-soach | 3punge.com/kako_dai14.html

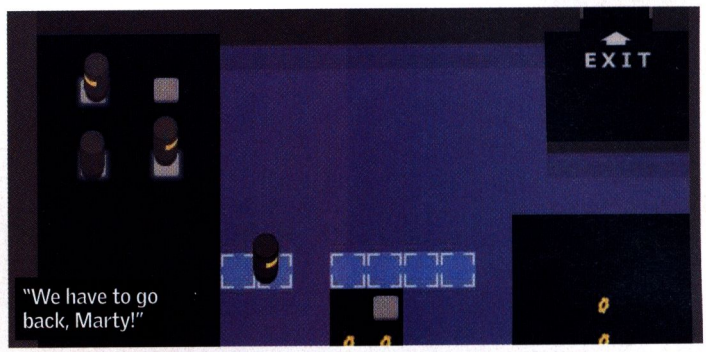
**RIGHT, THIS IS** a scary Japanese thing, but it's cool. It's called *Switch Lanes*, and it's extremely basic. One button makes you go faster and another slows you down, while no buttons, no matter how hard you look, enable you to turn or do anything else worthwhile. Ramps are dotted about the track, and you've got to drive over them; you have absolutely no choice. The only variable involved is how fast you're going – go too fast and you'll end up on a different lane to somebody who was going slower. Blue gates slow you down and yellow gates speed you up; ergo, you must go through as many yellow gates as possible to win the race. Using just two buttons. It's slightly better than what you're imagining, honestly.

# TIMEBOT

## Blerp, bwoorp, two o'clock

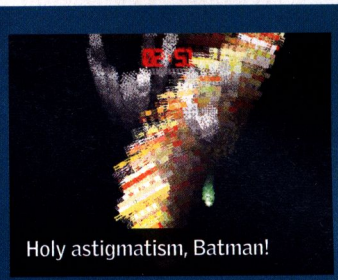
Dev: David Durham | snipurl.com/timebot

**HERE'S A FLASH** game for anybody who's ever written a note to their future self, or left some cooked bacon by their bed for a surprise morning treat. In *Timebot* you've got to activate pressure pads to open doors and raise bridges. With no heavy objects to leave on the pads, the only option is to use time itself to achieve your goals. Yes, time! Timebot can generate his past self, who'll replay all the moves you made up until you created your temporal doppelgänger. So sit on a switch for five seconds, generate a past version of you, move to the door you want to get through and watch as your past self helpfully sits on the very same switch for five seconds. Enough time for you to get through the door. It gets about 50 times more complicated than this too.
















# BURN THE TRASH

## Or recycle it; it's your choice, really

Dev: Cactus | 64digits.com/users/cactus/trash.zip

**THIS HAS BEEN** described by my trusty internet sources as 'glitchcore' – that is, a game characterised by looking like some errant code has gotten mashed up in the gears and sprogs that make up freeware games, before splaying itself onto the screen in filthy protest. But just like glitchcore music, it works well if done properly, and *Burn The Trash* is done good and proper.

It's a shoot-'em-up, and your ship has two modes of fire. One to destroy the enemy ships, and a second to destroy the enemy bullets. Continue firing for too long and you'll overheat, with a manic warning skittering across the screen in flashing-red-LED font. The music's decent, too, complementing the action exactly as you'd expect any drum-and-bass track to complement anything that's moving at speed. Not since *Pokémon*'s Missingno have we come across such an entertaining piece of glitchery.

# WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

## TOO MANY NINJAS




www.foddy.net/temp/test.html

How many ninjas is too many ninjas? Some might say that just one ninja is more than enough; others would violently disagree – but *Too Many Ninjas* settles on 'infinity' being the requisite number of ninjas to be considered 'too many'.

The game is reminiscent of that *IK+* mini-game where you've got to defend yourself from bouncing balls using a shield that makes an amazing 'pang' sound. What you have to do in *Too Many Ninjas* is stand firmly in the middle of the screen while ninjas fly at you from every conceivable angle, chucking shurikens and running at you. Use your trusty sword to fend off their increasingly rapid attacks, and try to get as high a score as possible. I managed to score 24 before a well-aimed shuriken tore my jugular right open and a blood sprite came out.



$30 per explosion – totally worth it.

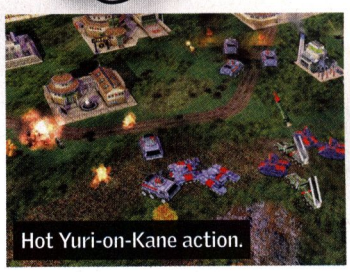
# COMMAND & CONQUER: ALL STARS

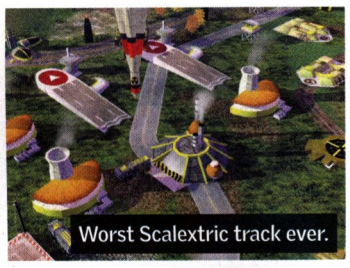
Play: MOD

PCZONE ON THE DVD

## It's like everyone's dad's having a scrap

www.cncgeneralsworld.com/allstars | Mod for: C&C Generals: Zero Hour


Hot Yuri-on-Kane action.


Worst Scalextric track ever.

**IT'S THE OLDEST** pub argument on record. Who would win a fight between an armoured mecha-shark and a titanium nano-bear? This mod seeks to answer that question, only in doing so, it ignores the stupid bear/shark scenario and focuses on the units in the different series of *C&C* that never managed to get their war on.

So who would kick whose ass if an Apocalypse tank from *Red Alert* came up against a *Tiberian* Overlord? That's the creative genius of this total conversion – every faction is an entire *C&C* series. So we have the GDI and the Brotherhood of Nod from the *Tiberian* series teaming up to fight the US, the GLA and China from the *Generals* series. The *Red Alert* series makes up the third faction.

With the best units from nine factions going into the mod – for sanity's sake, a lot of units have been dropped – you can see why the thing has been a full three years in development; this is a mammoth undertaking that would confound a highly funded professional team. As such, a few issues of balance and too-easy AI are to be expected, and have been pointed out to the team with the traditional subtlety of the internet.

This is pure *C&C* fantasy wank fodder, and if you care too much about the long-running series, you'll be itching to email the developers with all your ideas about what would make this even more the best mod, like, OMG, *ever*. It already is – in theory – but it needs a good few tweaks before we bellow with delight.


Tanks – aka Killtrundlers.

# CITY REBELLION V2

## *Jon Blyth* is rebellious

PCZONE ON THE DVD

www.parseerror.com/eric/cityrebellion.shtml | Mod for: Half-Life 2

Play: MOD

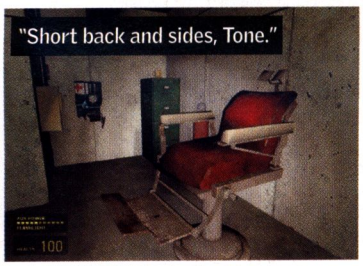
**INSTALLING THE *City Rebellion* mod made me realise how spoiled I'd become with Steam mods. I was appalled not to be presented with an installation wizard, and my pampered aristocratic hands got a certain dirty thrill from manually extracting files into a – I can barely bring myself to say it – folder.**

Once I'd done so, though, everything appeared in Steam and I could get back to my cosy, automated world. And the *City Rebellion* mod is pretty nice. Using *HL2*'s existing materials and characters (the mod only comes up to 26 meg), Eric Flynn has built a competent couple of levels and worked in a narrative, too.

There's a mistimed sense of drama (you're locked in a room and forced to listen to explosions for far too long), and finding your progress blocked by invisible walls during a moment of exposition tells you you're not dealing with the fluid, subtle hands of the Valve team. But there's a couple of interesting puzzles – even if I'm not convinced that electricity could really cause a gas cylinder to explode – and it's yet another distraction while we wait for the episodic ambassadors to crimp off Episode 2.



Well, if you will all enter through one door...

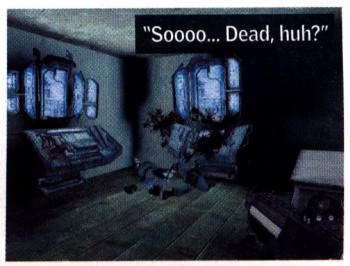


"Short back and sides, Tone."



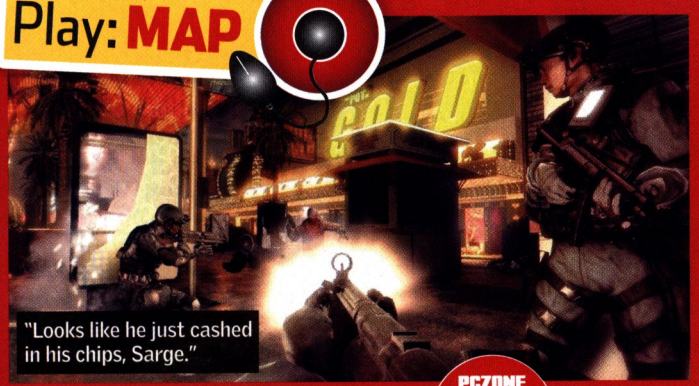
"Not now – *Strictly Come Dancing* is on."

"Heigh ho, heigh ho..."



"Soooo... Dead, huh?"

Play: MAP



"Looks like he just cashed in his chips, Sarge."

PCZONE ON THE DVD

# SIX PACK: VEGAS MAPPED

## Vivaaaa...

snipr.com/vegas_maps | Maps for: Rainbow Six: Vegas

**THESE MAP PACKS** have had a funny old history on the 360 – it turns out that some wiring got crossed, and people got charged 800MS points for something Ubisoft intended to be free. So the maps were pulled almost as quickly as they appeared, leaving people £6 out of pocket and with no one to play on their maps with. It's all better now (bless), and there'll be no such nonsense with the PC version. It's on our disc, and it's freer than a bird.

All ten maps are included on the disc, so if you've gotten weary of playing the current multiplayer maps online, there's a wealth of new, official stuff just waiting to sneak on over to your hard drive and restore your trigger-happiness.

# TRANSFORMERS

## 1942 in disguise

mods.moddb.com/9453 | Mod for: Battlefield 1942

PCZONE ON THE DVD

**IT'S TRANSFORMERS.** It doesn't have to be the best mod *ever*, because it's got Megatron stomping about and Bumblebee saying, "You stop killing them humans – I'm rather fond of them." That's the level of objective criticism we're capable of when it comes to *Transformers*. That film? Brilliant. Excellent storyline, and the camera definitely wasn't excessively close up *all the time*.

Same with this mod. Set in a typically bleak scenario where the Autobots are scattered and losing, it sees the robots fighting against the backdrop of WWII. There's probably something constructive or critical to say at this point. But I'll be damned if I'm saying a bad word about *Transformers*.

Play: MOD




"I also transform into Göring."

# PC ZONE JACKASS

## PILES OF STUFF

### Physics-based comedy at its finest

**PUTTING STUFF ON** other stuff is a tried and tested comedy formula. Long before people were dressing up their cats in sou'westers and putting it on the Internet, they were putting trombones on a wardrobe and laughing for two weeks. With this in mind, we started putting stuff on everything we could, with no rhyme or reason, until something made us laugh. Did we raise so much as a sad chuckle? Read on to find out.

## OBLIVION

**WE PUT:**
Watermelons, baskets, robes, a blue suede shoe, a staff, potatoes and an hourglass on a dead woman.

**RESULTS:**
Living characters in *Oblivion* are surrounded by a stubborn aura, which causes objects to fly from their bodies if you place them while they're asleep. For this reason, we killed our NPC first – two months ago, in fact, in issue 184's Jackass. Coming back into our house of the dead after so long, it seemed like the most appropriate thing to do was give our slaughtered bride a decent burial. So, like an Egyptian pharaoh being buried with his gold, we decided to drop watermelons, potatoes and clothes on her corpse. The hourglass – a lucky find – was symbolic of death, time and all that. Now our tragic wife was safely concealed from view, we could begin to enjoy our marital home again.



She looks pretty good for a two-month-old corpse. Hmm...




Janice, pictured without plant on head, sadly.

## DEUS EX

**WE PUT:**
The flora of the UNATCO building on Janice Reed's desk, face, floor.

**RESULTS:**
After scouring the first to third floors of UNATCO HQ, we managed to transform Janice's office into a patriotic jungle. Our attempts to introduce a water feature was ruined by the fact you can't pick up the water cooler. To compensate, we threw a few of the trophies lying around at her face. Most of these bounced off, but – finally! – one landed on her head and seemed unsure how exactly to fall off. "Manderley's waiting for you," she patiently explained, as we hurled the tenth pot plant at her. *Deus Ex* doesn't provide a way of killing Janice, so we jumped around for 20 seconds and walked off, without even seeing Manderley. Take that, Janice. You ain't the boss of me.

PCZONE PCZONE

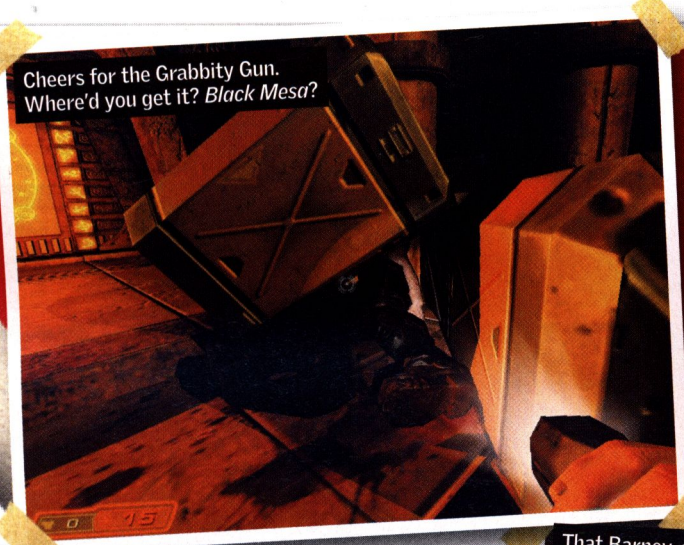
## HALF-LIFE 2

**WE PUT:**
Crates, palettes, Flavia, health stations and wardrobes on the victims of the Combine and headcrab massacre of humanity.

**RESULTS:**
Our first experiment was one of the headcrab zombies at the entrance to Ravensholme. We managed to get a couple of buckets on the guy before running out of stuff. So, via the magic of the developer's console, we whisked ourselves away to the urban wastelands of City 17's sewers. Here, we found plenty of stuff to balance on the corpses of our allies, but the nervous physics of the Source engine made it frustrating. Objects would fall through the corpse, melding plastics and flesh into something half human, half sanitary product. Irregular shapes caused undue toppling, and we realised for the first time that the shards of broken boxes disappear after a while. Your game is rubbish, Valve!



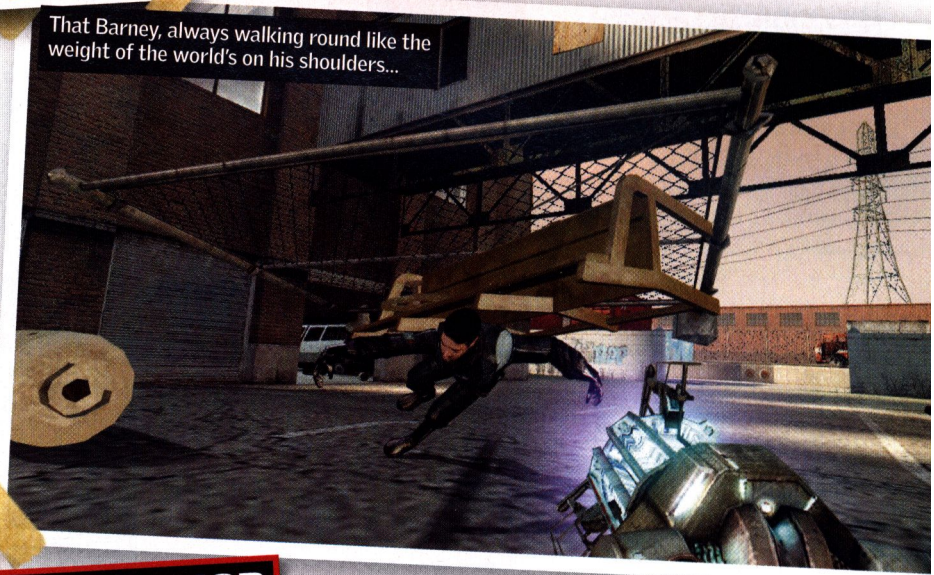
It seemed the only decent thing to do.


Cheers for the Grabbity Gun. Where'd you get it? *Black Mesa*?

## DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL

**WE PUT:**
Crates on the dead soldier who gave you the Grabber.

**RESULTS:**
Dead bodies don't hang around in *Doom 3* – no sooner have you blown off a cacodemon than their corpses return to the hell dimension. As such, we used a persistent, human corpse. The only grabbable things to hand were crates, which despite their regular cuboid shape stubbornly refused to stack. In the end we grabbed the corpse and fired it into a pillar. Not for amusement – out of pure, violent frustration.


That Barney, always walking round like the weight of the world's on his shoulders...

## SEND US YOURS!

**Have you found ways to play games in ways the developers never intended? Take a screenshot, video or just tell us what you did, and we'll print the best and put them online at www.pczone.co.uk. Email letters@pczone.co.uk, entitling your email 'PC ZONE Jackass'. Fame and prizes await!**

## GARRY'S MOD

**WE PUT:**
Iron railings, benches, and a dozen broken baby dolls on Barney Calhoun (deceased).

**RESULTS:**
Because we accidentally used the wrong menu in *Garry's Mod*, Barney spawned with dumb friendly AI, rather than as a ragdoll. To stop him politely avoiding us, we shot him in the face. Then we stretched him out into a dignified ballet pose, froze him in place with our physics gun, and daintily balanced benches and steel fences on him. This was surprisingly easy, so we thought we'd decorate our progress so far with a dozen baby dolls.

Unfortunately, just two toddlers toppled our sculpture, leading us to question the plausibility of the physics in *Half-Life 2*, and wonder whether those see-saw puzzles were actually the kind of problem you'd come across in real life... PCZ

# Online Zone

www.pczone.co.uk



**Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just hit www.pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!**



## NOTES FROM THE FORUM

### Why not send your gaming love and hate into the world?

**Narvask kicked off this month's debate about the online activation of *BioShock*. Last month, Pavel Barter looked at copy protection – but does this discourage or only encourage pirates of PC games?**

"Here I am £50 down the pan with a game (*BioShock*) I can't play due to the servers being offline till they decide to bring them back up. While some people I know are playing it for free. 2K Games have achieved the reverse of what they wanted – I know people who are taking their games back for a refund and just downloading it via pirate sites."

***Narvask***

"These anti-pirate measures just interfere with the legal users of the game – the people with the pirated version don't have to suffer all the messing about with CDs and internet activation. Software developers need to learn that these measures only piss off their customers, and have no visible effect on the pirated versions of their software."

***Scarlet_Pimp***

"They definitely lost a sale to me. I had enough with the whole *HL2* debacle."

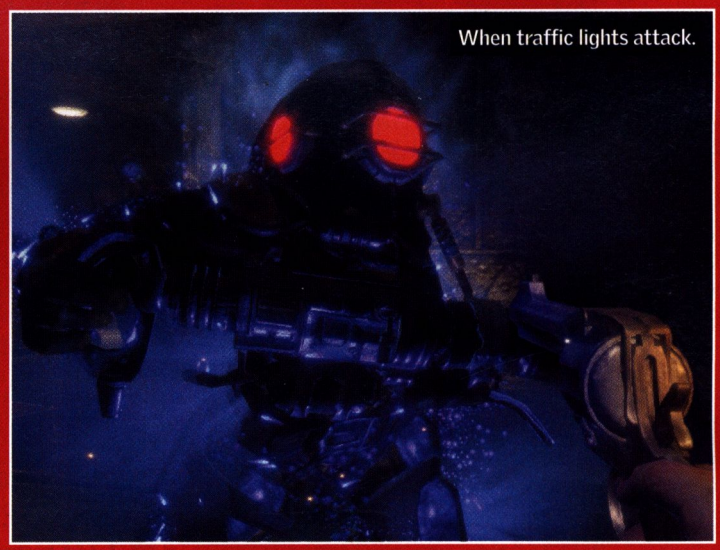
***paulkemp***

"It's true. It really annoys me when you have to validate your CD every four to five days. I've done it ten times – I think it's real now, OK?! It just wastes my time when I have to search through my cupboards for the CD so I can play. Normally I just CD-crack my games after I install, so they don't require it – but that's just a pain, because it's a separate application."

***Larnu***

"I usually end up getting a 'no DVD' crack for games; it's so much easier than ramming the CD in every time."

***theboosh***



When traffic lights attack.

## ON THE BLOG

PCZONE 2007

### What's been happening on *ZONE's* web diary this month...

**THIS MONTH,** before Blizzard announced *Wrath Of The Lich King*, we speculated about the new *WOW* expansion. Will thought the new area would be "underneath the big swirly whirlpool thing", Steve mused that it would be Northrend and Log asserted that "it'll be like a cross between *Innerspace*, that episode of *The Magic School Bus* where they learned about the digestive process, and *Honey, I Shrunk Myself And Entered You Last Night*".

Meanwhile, we encouraged you to get involved in the new Steam Community beta, so you can join in violent and/or funny deathmatch events with us. You can sign up at http://steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz.

Finally, Will attended the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany. He raved about Vivendi's *Prototype* and how lovely *STALKER: Clear Sky*'s lighting is – but even more exciting was a guy dressed as Sam from *Sam & Max* giving him a big hug. Keep an eye out for more blog fun and utter nonsense at www.pczone.co.uk.

**PCZONE PUBCAST!**

**Download Round 2 of the website-only pubcast NOW!**

## POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

**WIN!**

**Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...**

You already know all about our '*PC ZONE* Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your clan in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at **letters@pczone.co.uk** will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...

# FIGHT CLUB

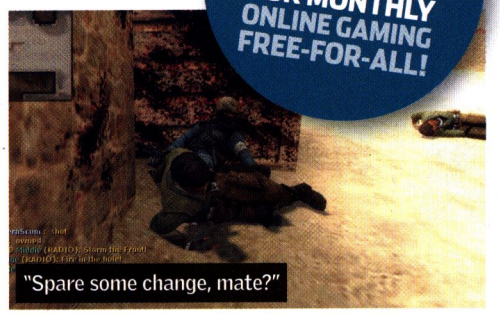
## Making you look good at games

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

**LIKE A DOG** returning to its vomit, this month we were back for more *Counter-Strike: Source*, with Jamie and Log flying the bullet-ridden flag. Beginning on the tunnel/hillbilly hybrid of cs_militia, the duo got straight into, well, getting shot – Jamie managing a proud zero kills for the entire session. Despite Log's white terrorist togs making him highly visible, he racked up some kills, but the best was to come...

De_dust was next up, a classic map that saw young Blyth top the league of terrorists for at least a minute, until the counter-terrorists, including DM Impaler, Cpl. McLuckie, [Quite] Rob and our own Mr Sefton, crushed him like a small piece of fruit. A mention has to go to [DM] Frink, who won a round for the counter-terrorists by bravely hiding behind a barrel until the time ran out.

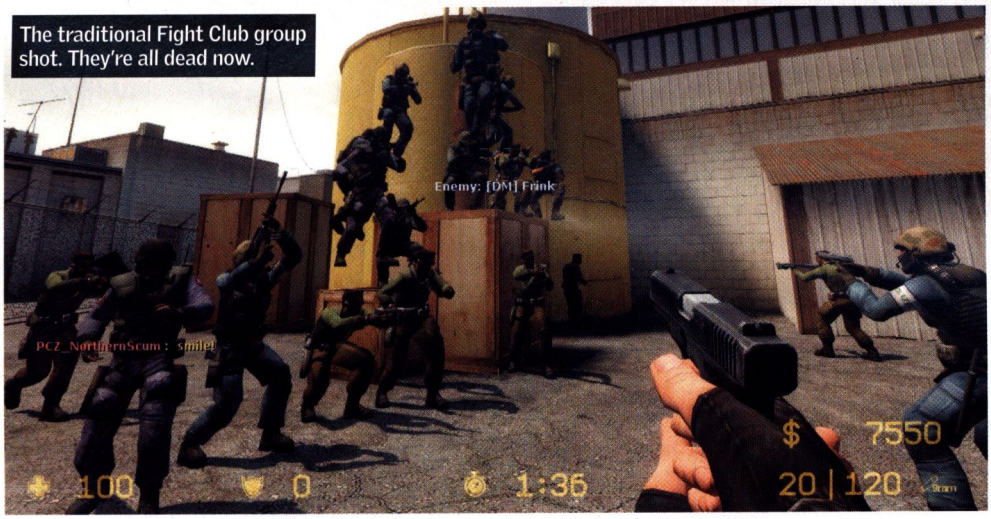
It was then onto de_nuke and the obligatory *PC ZONE* group shot, which took place outside – a beautiful pause in the mayhem while screenshots were grabbed.



"Spare some change, mate?"

The peace didn't last long, though, and within seconds multiple bodies were flying hither and thither – Log described it as being "like my brother's wedding".

Next month we'll be playing *Team Fortress Classic* in preparation for the release of Valve's Orange Box – see you there on Tuesday September 25 at 6pm.




The traditional Fight Club group shot. They're all dead now.

# ZONE CHAT

## A virtual chinwag is but a click away

**IT WAS A** low-key Zone Chat this month; Will was in Leipzig, Steve and Suzy were working flat out to review this month's big games, and Log only had half an hour before he had to interview the gods of *Peggle* over at PopCap. So it was only a brief chat, which mainly featured the long-awaited "What's so special about *BioShock* anyway?" backlash from our very own prince of disinterest, Ebony. Then Log had to leave, without even the time to say goodbye. Damned impudence, eh?



*Peggle*: distractor of Log.

To make up for it, next month we'll be giving away four times the prizes and typing like billy-o. Just join #pcz on the QuakeNet server at 5:30pm on Monday September 24. For reminders about this and Fight Club, join our Steam Community group at steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz.

### How to join in!

If you fancy joining the *ZONE* Chat, you need an IRC program and an internet connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install, set the options, devise an online identity, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

### Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy fighting fires in Greece armed with a special hose – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers. Who knows – some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

**WHO'S WHO**

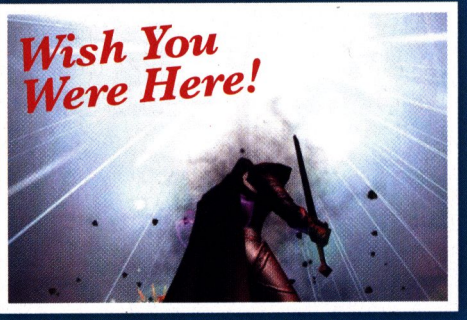
Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

1. **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
   cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
   cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
2. **HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH**
   hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
3. **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
   dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
4. **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
   tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
5. **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
   et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
6. **PREY**
   prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
7. **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
   bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
8. **JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
   Listed in NovaWorld




"Salutations from Elona! Here I am admiring the Vabbian architecture in the *Guild Wars* world. My Ritualist believes himself to be above the whole 'suxons' shouting riff-raff and prefers to enjoy the finer things in life."

*Gaiden Shinjii* (Will Lord)




"Hi! This is my character in *City Of Heroes*, known as Shadow Fury (there's a team in there somewhere, I'm sure). We just beat up one of Rularuu's minions in the Shadow Shard. DON'T GO INTO THE LIGHT! At least not without sunscreen."

*Shadow Fury* (Stev Bartlett)



# RetroZONE

*Jon Blyth* tries to remember what the Lynx actually was

# ATARI LYNX




**EMULATION OF THE MONTH**

## BUT HOW?

There's only one reliable emulator for the Lynx, and it's called Handy. It's simple and effective... and comes complete with a fake boot file that won't allow you to play any of the ROMs you download. Hurray! The file you'll be wanting to replace is LynxBOOT.img. It's 512 bytes in size, and is relatively easy to find, if you avoid the botblogs and suchlike. Once that's sorted, you'll be Lynxing away like a good 'un.

## Links...

1. **Handy**
   handy.sourceforge.net
   **The homepage for the best emulator for the Lynx – although it's hardly an overpopulated market.**

2. **Alessio Viti**
   www.alessioviti.com
   **The website to look for in the results, when you Google 'download' and 'lynxboot.img'.**

**EIGHTEEN ISSUES OF** the revamped Retro Zone later, and I've finally hit upon an emulator for a platform about which I know cock all. Until this week, I'd never seen an Atari Lynx, let alone played *Klax* on one of the oversized bastards. Of course, I know it was the first colour handheld, and it failed due to the ubiquity of its opponent, poor sales and a consequent lack of third-party support. I know this... because Wikipedia told me.

Clearly my knowledge of the Lynx is somewhat lacking, so I ask everyone else about it. What are Will's memories of the groundbreaking handheld? "My mate had one of them. But then, he had a Jaguar, too. He was funny like that." What about Steve? Steve thinks for a moment – he really has no right knowing about these things, being nine years old. "There was a good Batman game for the Lynx," he says. I download it and play it. It's shit.

Intrigued at how far the ignorance of this device extends, I inquire a little further afield. "Didn't it get through the batteries?" offers someone. "The handheld thing? Never had one," says someone else. Then a small voice pipes up, like a mouse who knows the meaning of life: "I had one." At last, I can get an insight into the handheld that inspires so many furrowed brows and squints of half-remembrance! So, what was it like, I ask. "All right."

Ladies and gentlemen, the Atari Lynx. The one console it's physically impossible to give a shit about.







## SIX OF THE BEST

**The colour handheld miracles that not many people played**



**PAC-LAND**
See MAME Frame for more memories on this one – the Lynx had a great conversion of this arcade classic.




**KLAX**
Twenty years after I first played it, I got my first Big X. I got 80,000 points – I was expecting fireworks.



**CALIFORNIA GAMES**
Cut-down versions of games in a collection cut down from the original line-up. Still good... just cut down.



**GAUNTLET 3**
It's *Gauntlet* with scorpions and an inventory, but without enemy spawn factories, or much in the way of fun.



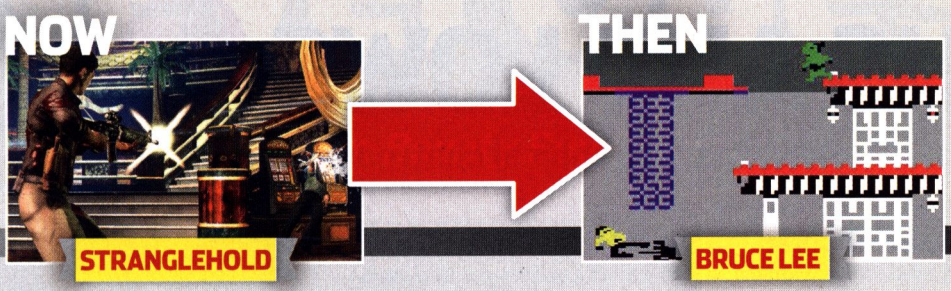
**DOUBLE DRAGON**
It took me a while to find the 'elbow to the face' back-attack, and it's not as infallible as it was in the arcade. Boo!



**BATMAN RETURNS**
One of those 'large energy bar, but get constantly hit' games. Steve liked it, but Steve is wrong.

# NOW & THEN

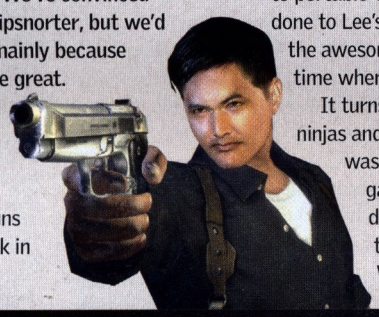
## *Stranglehold* vs *Bruce Lee*




With *Stranglehold*, we're about to see whether the technology of videogames is ready for John Woo's world of high-action gun fu. We've convinced ourselves it's going to be a ripsnorter, but we'd be the first to admit that's mainly because we really, really want it to be great.

*Bruce Lee* had a totally different style of combat to Woo's bangabouts – you don't find many monks of Wing Chun running about guns akimbo, for starters. But back in 1984, there was similar excitement when Ocean Software brought the adventures of Bruce Lee to portable TVs everywhere. Could justice be done to Lee's superhuman physical prowess and the awesome majesty of his deadly art in a time when pixels were the size of hailstones?

It turns out it could; with conveyor belts, ninjas and a fat green sumo guy, *Bruce Lee* was a triumph, briefly redefining what gaming was, till someone changed the definition back and asked everyone to stop mucking about. Take note, Woo – this is how it's done.

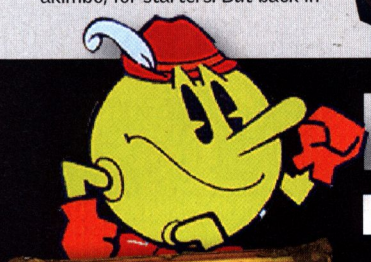


## PLAY IT!

**The *Bruce Lee* game is well emulated, but clever bod Mark Rosten has been kind enough to develop a complete PC remake, and has made it freely available, because he's lovely.**

1. **Go to www.planetflibble.com/blitz**
2. **The main download link was broken when we went there, but the alternate location was working. Click there.**
3. **It's an .exe file, so your computer might ask you about nasty viruses. That's up to you, really.**
4. **This isn't actually pirating anything, so on this occasion we're not encouraging you to break the law. Next month we'll make up for it by inciting hate crimes or something.**



# MAME FRAME

## PAC-LAND Developer: Namco | Year: 1984




Come out of your maze, Pac-Man. Step into the daylight, and take in the bracing air of your mountain town. There's a fairy in your hat who wants you to escort her back to her magical kingdom. She says the queen of the fairies will give you a pair of magical dancing boots.

*Pac-Land* was great, for millions of reasons. One, I was dead good at it. Two, the music on the way back from the fairy kingdom was a brilliant funky version of the original theme, and I've whistled it through my teeth for the last 20 years. Three, there was a helmet hidden under the fourth fire hydrant on Trip 1, and getting it was a cool way to show off to any six-year-olds standing around you. Finally, you got 7,650 points for timing your jump right at the end of a stage, which would make observers of any age scream in delight and offer you their hand in marriage.

In summary, *Pac-Land* is great and you should play it. Do so now.





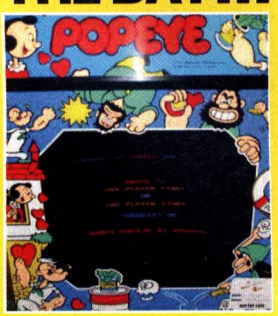





## WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 3,500 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.

## BACK IN THE DAY...




### POPEYE

***By Log***

I was brought up in a pub, and during the famous '80s 'golden era' of videogaming, pubs were the perfect place for games – especially for me, as I had the best games of the era shipped directly into my home.

*Popeye* – to me – is the game that ended this arrangement and ruined my childhood life. It sat, unplayed and unpopular, in our pool room. I alone would play it every now and then. *Popeye* single-handedly convinced my father that pubs were no longer the place for videogames. From then on, I was to make a weekly pilgrimage into town – with only the money I'd stolen from the till to accompany me. Thanks a lot, *Popeye* – you ruined my childhood and made me a thief.

SUPERTEST

# MMO HIGHS AND LOWS

PCZONE ON THE DVD

**The many and varied glories of the grind-based graphical chatroom explained...**

## YOUR VIEW

Last month was all about games that smelt and played like bum. Here's a selection of your worthiest thoughts...

**TOLD YOU SO**
"*Daikatana* is probably the worst I've played. I only bought it because it was meant to be the worst game ever, and I thought I'd try it and see. It was dreadful."
**Jonny_p66**

**SCARY TALE**
"I must confess that I sat the whole way through *Phantasmagoria* the year it was released. The girl I was seeing borrowed it from a friend, and couldn't finish it on her own..."
**SunScramble**

**HEDZ SHOCK**
"I swallowed an entire box of wood screws after playing *Hedz*, hoping that they would end my pain. Instead, they just made my bum magnetic and spiky."
**CSDaveUK**

**BUT SERIOUSLY...**
"*Serious Sam II*. I can think of absolutely no merit to that game whatsoever. It was just shite."
**Reverend_Joseph**

**IT'S ALL GOOD**
"I read *PC ZONE* and take note of their reviews. I, therefore, have yet to play a really bad game."
**G_Hughes**

**MORE PRAISE, PLEASE**
"Flattery will get you everywhere."
**BatsphinxPCZ**

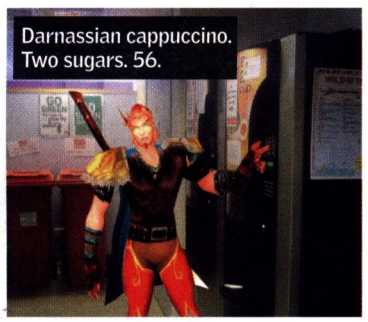
**THIS MONTH'S SUPERTEST shenanigans kicked off with the rather bizarre statement from Will that he prefers playing MMOs when there's nobody else around to spoil it, and ended with near-universal agreement that the *Second Life* bubble burst the moment *Channel 4 News* started broadcasting from its depths while studiously ignoring all the avatars shagging in the bushes.**

Dealing with those unique moments that make massively multiplayer gaming alternately wonderful and a wee bit disturbing, both Will's reminiscences of his days as a dancer for money in Dalaran (featuring striking/disturbing similarities to the life of Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*) and Log's touching tale of being bought an overcoat by an overzealous high-level admirer in *Anarchy Online* should be approached with extreme caution. You have been warned.

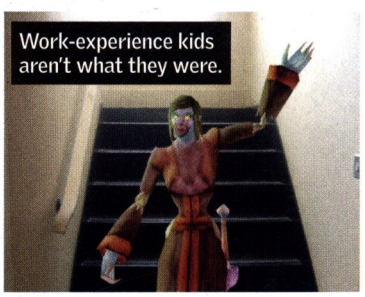
The discussion wasn't entirely tainted with the faint musk of non-specific inter-species lust, though – if you listen long enough you'll get to hear a rather moving story about a troll we met once who (in the real world) had lost his dog and was a bit worried about it. Apparently not worried enough to stop playing *WOW* for five minutes and actually look for it, but worried nonetheless.

So, anyway, have a listen to Will, Log and Steve regaling you with sordid tales from the fantastical netherworld over a selection of fine wines and cheeses by opening the file that sits atop the DVD, and, should you feel the urge to join in the conversational fun, do so on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. PCZ


Log, in his *Anarchy Online* garb.


Darnassian cappuccino. Two sugars. 56.


Can't beat the feeling of wind in your fur.


Work-experience kids aren't what they were.


*City Of Heroes*: bringing unhealthy fantasy to life since 2004.

**It wasn't all tainted with the faint musk of inter-species lust...**

# STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



## *Steve Hill* is all at sea in *Bounty Bay Online*...

**ROGER THE CABIN** boy, splice the main brace, all hands on deck at dawn for a rollicking seafaring adventure. I have been many things in the cause of NeverQuest – a wizard, a troll, a sex pest – but I don't think I've ever been a sailor. I've certainly never been a sailor with a Flock Of Seagulls haircut. It's a good look for me, though, albeit one that appears to have cost more than the rest of my outfit put together. I may be dressed in rags, but I have a boat to commandeer, the Life Saving Ship With The Title Of Glory, no less, which might have lost something in translation.

Before I can set sail, I need provisions, so address a nearby member of the crew.

"Your smack is ready," he casually replies, which is either another linguistic mix-up or this is a very different kind of sailing. Either way, I give him two silver coins, gratefully accept the stash and head for the docks. Faced with a career choice, I opt to be a captain fighting pirates. By way of celebration, I kick a passing turtle to death, a senseless act that I attempt to justify by keeping the shell.

### OCEAN RAIN

I hang around the docks long enough to recruit some sailors, and set sail off the coast of Constantinople (not Istanbul). I've scarcely found my sea legs when I sail straight into a wild storm that tosses my flimsy craft around the high seas like so much balsa wood. Tattered and torn, I make for the sanctuary of port for some much needed repairs. I am mere yards away when a pirate ship issues a broadside and swiftly sinks me.

Back on shore, still seething, it seems that a life on the open seas may not be for me. Undeterred, I decide to call in the big guns. I've heard tell of a legendary seafarer by the name of Prezzer. Through my contacts, and a mystical contraption known as a mobilefone, I arrange a meeting and head for the Constantinople Tavern to await the great man.

A large, well-appointed boozer, it is, however, distinctly lacking in punters. There's a young wench at the bar wearing a veil on her face, and not much else. I attempt to strike up a conversation, but Julia isn't interested, bemoaning the fact that "sailors do nothing but drink all day".

### LAGER LAGER LAGER

That sounds like a plan, and I ask a waiter called Don Beard for a "strong continental lager", telling him, "I'll be sat over there."

Taking a pew at one of the many empty tables, the waiter strolls past with no sign of my drink. "Where is it, then?" I demand.

"How do you get it?" splutters Don.

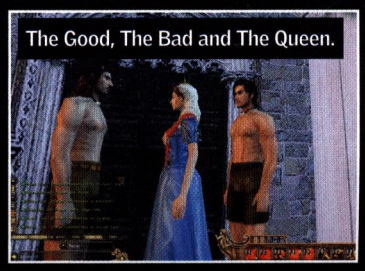
"You're the barman," I point out.

"I'm a waiter," he protests.

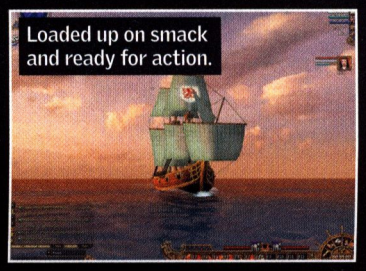
"Get waiting, then, garçon," I implore.

"I'll get right on figuring that one out," he promises.

"I'm dying of thirst here, sunshine," I plead, rather hopelessly.



The Good, The Bad and The Queen.



Loaded up on smack and ready for action.

**"It's dog shit!" I yell. "I'd like to buy a vowel," replies the confused waiter**

"She won't give me one," says the hapless Beard.

"Fucking useless," I bark. "What kind of establishment is this?"

"This kind," offers the hapless barkeep.

"It's dog shit!" I yell.

"I'd like to buy a vowel," replies the clearly confused waiter.

Thankfully, at this point Prezzer strolls in to save the day. He's travelled over land and sea to be here, but is immaculately turned out, a neatly trimmed chin-glove offset by his lustrous ginger locks.

"Hello, sailor!" he cries cheerfully, and I thank him for coming out.

"Nay bother," he says, despite having sailed from Old London Town.

Straight down to business, he asks me how much cash I have, and generously tops up my 8,000 with a further 50 grand. We head to the docks and upgrade my ship with new crew, cannons and sails. A formidable team, we hit the high seas, hunting down pirates and sinking them via a combination of superior firepower and laboriously circling them while clicking on the hull of their ship with ye olde mouse.

It's fun for a while, but I soon yearn to see the wider world, so Prezzer casually suggests that we could go to London to see the Queen. I'm all over the idea like a soup sandwich, and stock up on sailors and smack for the journey. It's not quite as arduous as it sounds, and simply involves sitting behind Prezzer's ship while he leads the way, which even leaves me time to make a brew.

The white mountains of Dover soon loom into view, and after a brief chat with Shakespeare, we address her majesty, Queen Elizabeth. Lost in the moment, we both take our clothes off.

"Spit roast?" suggests Prezzer, wholly inappropriately. PCZ



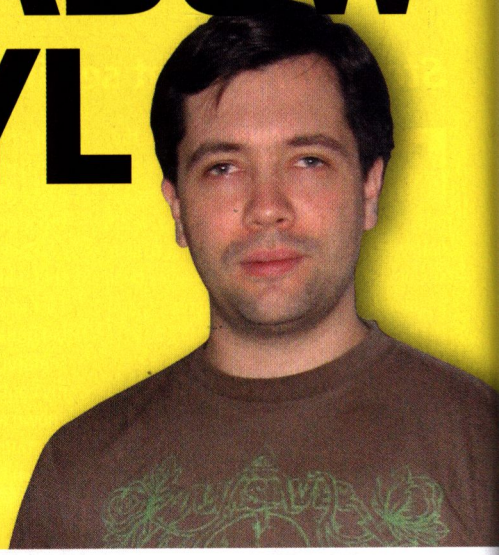
Whose deck do I have to swab to get a drink around here?



Not bad considering I've just been sunk.

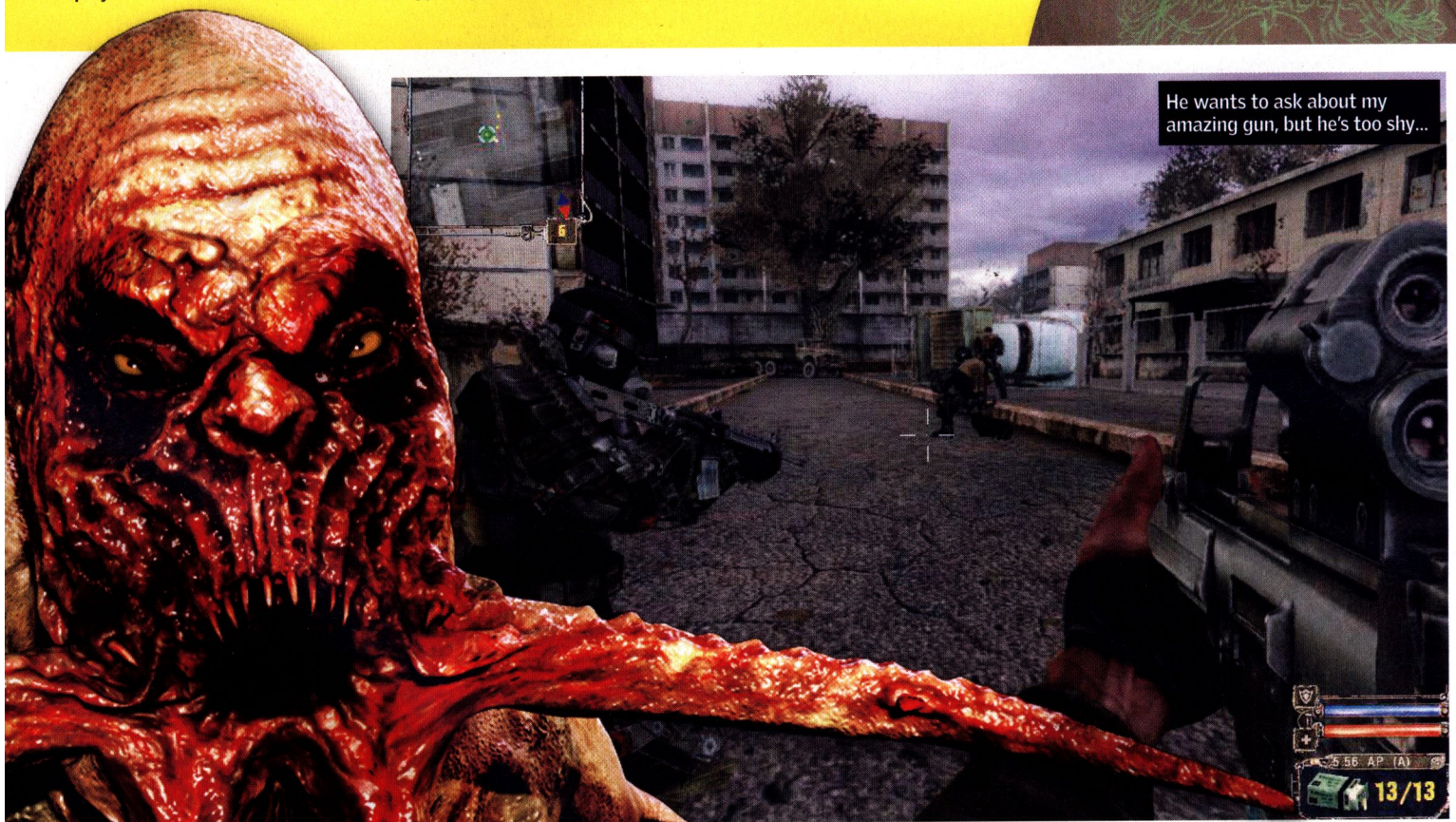
## DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

# STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

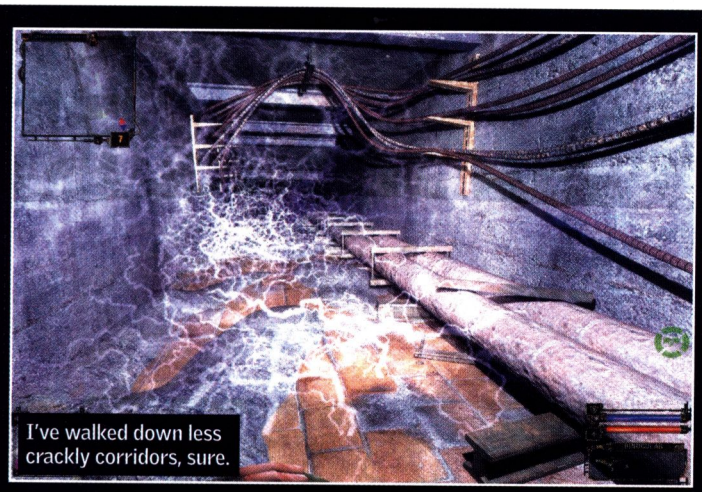


**_Jon Blyth_ dons his radiation suit and chats to a known Stalker about anomalies, realism and learning from your mistakes**

***STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL***, apart from being one of the most delayed games of recent memory, was the reason behind some of the most haunting press trips of last year. Journalists were taken to Chernobyl, Ukraine, to witness the desolate ghost town, the deserted playgrounds, the slow decay and the living history. All these things found their way into *STALKER*, making it a hugely atmospheric and memorable shooter. Over the long development process, the team gave some candid interviews – and when we caught up with project leader Anton Bolshakov, he was typically frank about what went right and wrong in *Chernobyl*...




**01** **CHECK OUT MY GUNS:** "From the very outset we were keen on realism – realistic graphics, environments, stalkers, physics, gameplay – we had long arguments with the publisher as to what extent of realism should be preserved in the game, and had to fight for every inch. Our goal with the guns was to achieve 100 per cent realism with bullet trajectory, adjusting material-piercing qualities and so on. We couldn't do everything ourselves, though – some source material, photos and technical info on certain guns were contributed by the community. That stuff was used as reference when we created our weapon prototypes."



I've walked down less crackly corridors, sure.

**02** **NUCLEAR EFFECTS:** "From the photos and documentaries filmed at the time of the Chernobyl accident, we knew that the strong radiation could affect photos and videotape. It left a grainy kind of noise effect on it. So we started by creating the radiation filter effect on screen – when the player would enter a radiation hotbed, we copied this, making the screen greyish and noisy.

"In a similar fashion, our art designers tried to imagine what the gravitational, electric, acid and all other types of anomalies could possibly look like, so that the player, after stepping inside, would realise something's wrong. The anomalies needed to be inconspicuous and alarming to the incautious player. After pestering programmers for some time, we worked out a number of cool-looking and original anomaly effects ready to enrich our spooky Zone."

**03** **LIVING THE A-LIFE:** "I really enjoy observing the non-scripted combats driven by A-life – things that just take place here and there. You can see a pack of blind dogs get in the way of a military patrol. They start fighting, and you're just passing by, an involuntary witness. You can watch the scene, or you can sneakily take advantage, and use the distraction to get closer to the military while they are killing the dogs. Attack them from cover, and get some easy loot. When you realise that the game actually creates these situations without any preliminary planning of the designers, it really blows your mind off. Our A-life system is unique for shooters, and we see lots of potential here. All this is just the beginning."



In the future, dogs will be hunted by rabbits with binoculars.



**04** **FAVOURITE BITS:** "My personal favourites are Escape and Pripyat. Escape is very cool to immerse the player into the Zone and the stalker community – the first fights against bandits and bribing the military are simply unforgettable. I love Pripyat for the fact that it turned out pretty realistic-looking. It reminds me of the trips made into the exclusion zone – all the rubble, the Ferris wheel, derelict buildings, ruined facilities, barren streets overgrown with trees and bushes – it's a striking image to remember."

"Lightning? Let's take shelter under that huge metal wheel!"

> **"The gravi-glove was supposed to drag objects around and let you throw them at targets"**
> Anton Bolshakov, project leader, *STALKER*

**05** **THE CUTTING-ROOM FLOOR:** "Largely all the monsters and anomalies got in. We had to do a bit of cutting with what either didn't fit well or was too complex to implement. For example, Burer got cut due to a problem of colliding with certain geometry; in the underground where he 'lives', the geometry is pretty complex, and he didn't pass all the areas very well. Also, marketing suggested that we take our rat monsters out – it seems rats are not very well liked in the US.

"One interesting item we have in our original design document is called 'gravi-glove' – when equipped, it was supposed to drag physical objects around to your hand and let you throw them at targets. However, after *Half-Life 2* was the first to announce a similar weapon, we decided to cut that to avoid possible similarities. One of the anomalies cut out is dubbed 'deadly flying spikes' – accumulated in one place, they would instantly whiz to pierce the victim. There were a few bits and pieces left out, but nothing really major."

No mates, and down to his last marshmallow...

"Hi. Me and my mates wondered if you wanted to have lunch at our table today?"

**06** **MAKING A RACKET:** "Most of the time when you play against NPCs, you can still see from the way they react that it's not a human player you're fighting. Occasionally, though, the AI in our game made our jaws drop, when the character acted so like a human that it was both eerie and awe-inspiring. It would be in the heat of a fight between two rival factions – one side is taking the upper hand, and there's just one enemy left alive. Some NPC would rush forward, shouting, 'Let me get him!' He'd fire point-blank at the enemy, see how the body is falling down, put another bullet into him to be on the safe side, then walk away saying something like, 'That's what you deserve, rascal.' We laughed so much, and wondered how the hell the AI programmer makes them do that kind of thing. They can feel like real people playing the game."

Binoculars

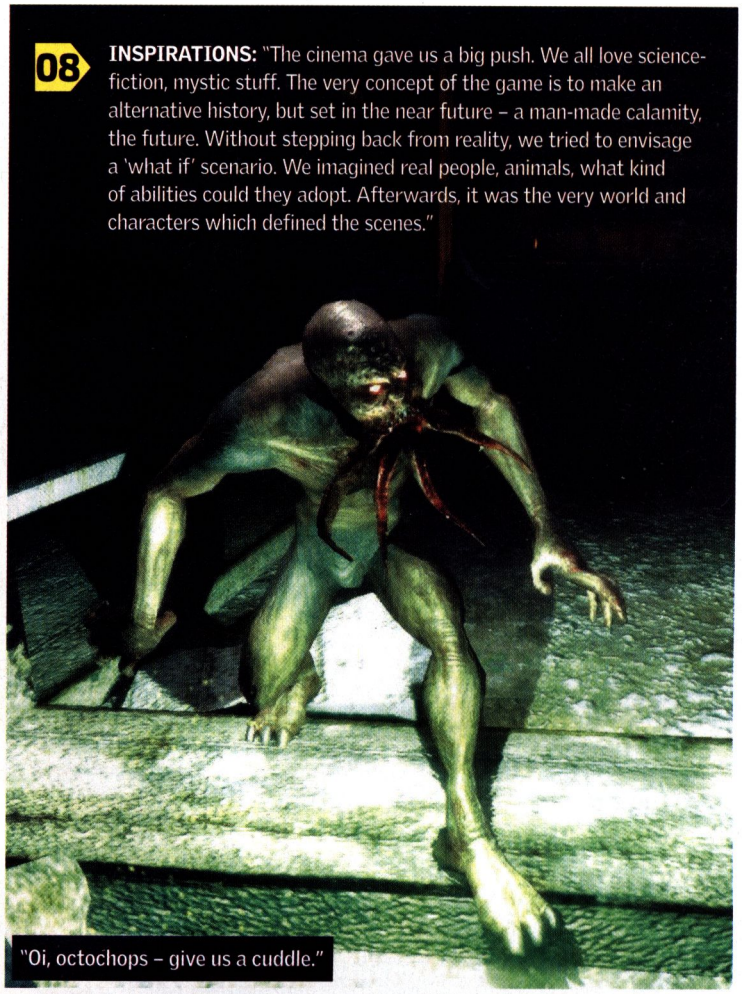


Terrible place to lose a contact lens...

**07** **LOST ZONES:** "In terms of levels, Dead City got cut out, Generators was ultimately combined with Station 2 and we got rid of a driving level. From the outset, *STALKER* was built in a pretty non-standard way – geometry was modelled first, then the gameplay designers would consider what to place around it. As a result, some locations looked great, but at the gameplay-creation stage we had to sacrifice them.

"Obviously that's not the most efficient method of game-building, and we do things rather differently now. First off, we create the geometry primitives and fiddle around with those, then we think up the gameplay, and only after we've done that is the complex geometry produced. There's nothing innovative about this, really; it's just the right way to do things – it comes with experience."

**08** **INSPIRATIONS:** "The cinema gave us a big push. We all love science-fiction, mystic stuff. The very concept of the game is to make an alternative history, but set in the near future – a man-made calamity, the future. Without stepping back from reality, we tried to envisage a 'what if' scenario. We imagined real people, animals, what kind of abilities could they adopt. Afterwards, it was the very world and characters which defined the scenes."



"Oi, octochops – give us a cuddle."



Reminiscing about old episodes of *The Golden Girls*...

**09** **MULTIPLE ENDINGS**: "This idea is related to the fact that a role-playing game is not necessarily about going up levels – we provide the possibility of playing a certain role, which is a more classic understanding of what a role-playing game is. The game is realistic, so if the player couldn't jump at the start of the game, he won't be jumping on top of skyscrapers at the end. The role-playing-game aspect of *STALKER* is all about the world providing choice and the player making decisions.

"Having a number of possible endings reflects the fact that the world reacts to your decisions. Again, this is just the first step. It's all about a living and breathing world, and this is the direction we consider the most promising and interesting to evolve into.

"The fact that the endings were cryptic was driven by the fact that we didn't want the Zone story to end in the first game. So we decided not to reveal what the actions of the player would ultimately lead to." PCZ

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**What's your favourite cereal?**

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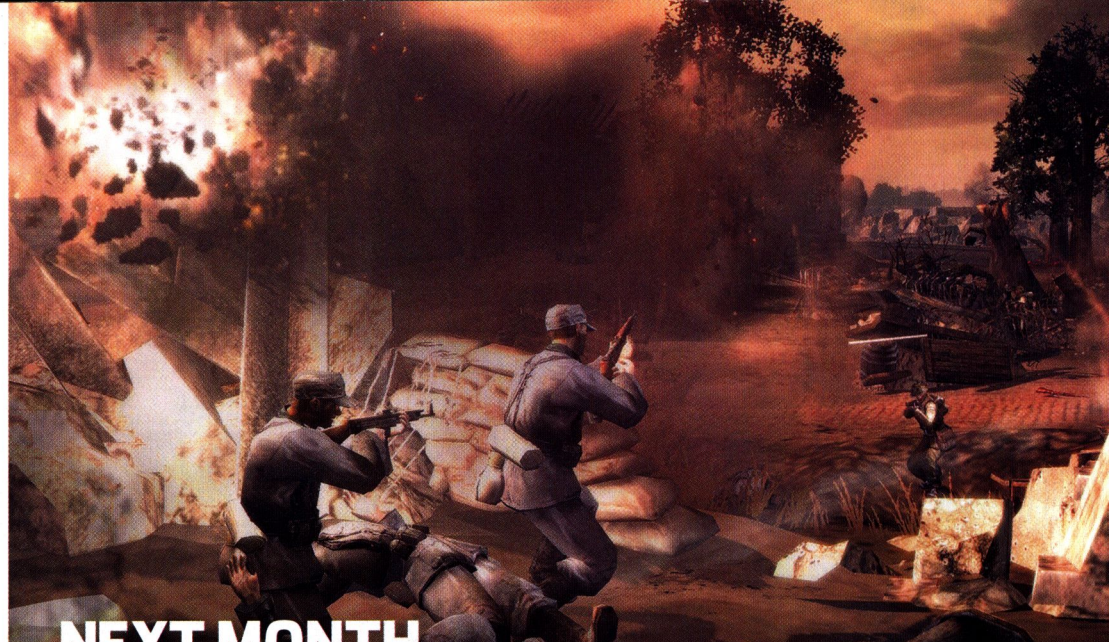
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On sale Thursday, October 11.
Which is very nearly Jamie's birthday.


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5/5
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"When Lawrence trumps in the diving suit, it's like he really trumps in the diving suit"
★★★★★
Alabama Herald
BIG DADDY'S HOUSE
"I laughed until I evolved a second electric mouth which I discovered I could use to tear through the bodies of my foes"
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